

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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by W.L. Fieldhouse

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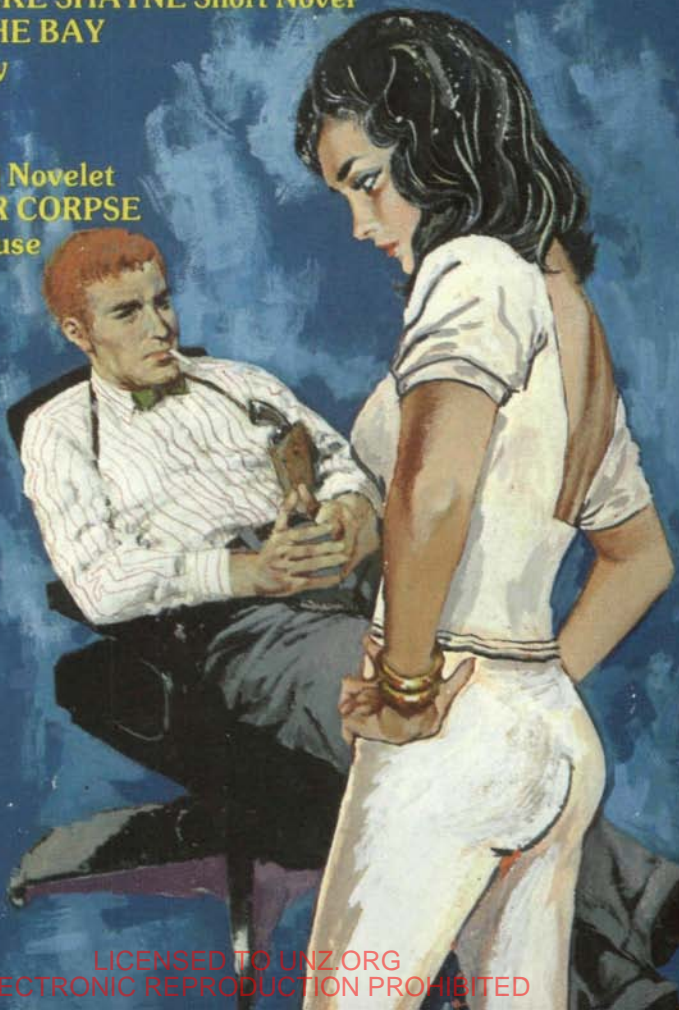
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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEB. 1980
VOL. 44, NO. 2
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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

MURDER BY THE BAY

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Was it a gang killing or the work of smugglers? Either way, the redheaded Miami detective was caught in the middle, the target of both! 5

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAKERS

You've already met most of the nice people listed on this issue's table of contents. One you haven't is HAROLD STRAUBING, author of *The Million Dollar Brain* and *The Strange Case of Louie the Hippo* (whew!), who furnished the following miniautobiography:

Started writing cartoon gags for national magazines in the late thirties when it became apparent that I had more talent in that direction than as a lettering and layout artist. Drifted to Miami, Florida and worked as a gag man on animated motion pictures such as Gulliver's Travels, Popeye, Betty Boop, etc.

Wrote and directed radio shows in Miami in spare time, later did a 3½-year stint with the U.S. Army during the big war. Aside from soldiering, wrote, directed and produced radio shows over the Blue Network (WKBO in Harrisburg, Pa.) for the Army, later wrote SNAFU animated cartoons for the Army-Navy Screen Mag. Last picture I wrote (SNAFU IN JAPAN) is somewhere in the bowels of the Museum of Modern Art in NYC.

Wrote and edited comic books after WW II for Magazine Management and Gleason Pub. Old copies of CRIME DOES NOT PAY and other titles carry my name on the cover.

I was comics editor of the New York Herald Tribune Syndicate as well as for the newspaper — then moved on to become editor of Associated Press Newsfeatures. Edited men's magazines and a romance magazine for several years, then moved in and out of editing erotic publications. Last five years executive editor of magazine and book publishing house with short pieces crawling out of my typewriter on occasion.

Have written for all types of mags from comic books to the Saturday Evening Post.

Scripts, etc. that I have produced over the years now repose at the University of Wyoming (Rare and Special Books Div.) and are part of the National Archives. This piece will find an eventual resting place in that division.

(Continued on page 93)

Murder By The Bay

by BRETT HALLIDAY



A dead man's body, discovered at the beach, leads Mike Shayne along a bloody path of violence from which even he might not escape!

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MIKE SHAYNE was in his office on Flagler Street, smoking a cigarette meditatively and staring out the window at a rare gray day in Miami.

A fine mist coated the window and blurred Shayne's view. The big redheaded detective took a deep drag on the butt and then ground it out. Something about this day was making him remember other times in other places. Abruptly, he decided to break the blue funk he was in by closing the office early and taking Lucy Hamilton, his lovely more-than-secretary, out for an early supper.

He didn't get the chance to tell her of his decision, though. The door to the outer office swung open, and Lucy put her head

through. She said, "Michael, can I bring someone in to see you?"

Shayne turned away from the window and asked, "A client? I don't know, Angel ..."

"She's a friend of mine, Michael. And you know her, too. Mrs. Reyes."

Shayne's craggy brow drew down into a frown. He thought back over the myriad of people he knew, trying to place the name, which was vaguely familiar but nothing more. Lucy saw his bafflement and said hurriedly, "She works in the building where I live. She's the cleaning lady."

Shayne remembered the woman then, having seen her several times while visiting Lucy. He said, "What's it about, Angel?"

"I'm not sure. She's very upset, though, and she insists you're the only one who can help her."

Shayne didn't like the sound of that. He was in no mood for hysterics. But the look in Lucy's eyes told him he should see the woman. Lucy had a big heart, and if she had her way, would turn away no one who came to them for help. Shayne supposed that was one reason why she was much more than just his secretary.

"All right," he said. "Send her in. We'll see what it's all about."

Lucy gave him a smile that made the gloomy day go away for a second. "Thank you, Michael."

She ducked back into the outer office and returned a moment later with an older woman. As Shayne stood up, Lucy said, "This is Mr. Shayne, Mrs. Reyes. You tell him all about your problem."

Shayne nodded to the woman and kept his voice polite as he said, "Hello. What can we do for you?"

Mrs. Reyes looked at Shayne with something akin to worship, making the big redhead slightly uncomfortable. She was not a large woman. She was perhaps fifty, with dark hair and eyes, and Shayne sensed a certain basic toughness in her. She declared, "Miss Hamilton says you are the best detective in the world. You will help me?"

Shayne saw Lucy beginning to blush as she stood behind Mrs.

Reyes. He tried not to grin as he said, "I don't know about the first part of that, but I'll try to help you if you'll have a seat and tell me what it's all about."

She sat down gingerly in the client's chair in front of the desk and said, "It is about my son, Emiliano. He is the one who needs your help, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne sat down, too, and flipped his notebook open. "Your son is in some kind of trouble?"

"The police arrested him today."

Shayne shot a glance at Lucy. "On what charge?"

"They say he killed a man."

Shayne's jaw tightened. This wasn't what he had expected. When he looked at Lucy again, he saw that she too was surprised.

Mrs. Reyes went on, "Emiliano would never do such a thing, Mr. Shayne. I want you to help him, to prove that he is innocent."

Shayne could tell by her voice that she was under a great strain and was keeping a tight rein on her emotions. He said, "Tell me exactly what happened. Who is your son supposed to have killed?"

"A friend of his named Paco Cruz. He and Emiliano argued, and the police say that Emiliano stabbed him."

That rang a bell in Shayne's mind. He had read Tim Rourke's story in the *Miami Daily News* about the discovery of a body on the beach a few days before.

Shayne remembered now that the victim had been a Puerto Rican named Paco Cruz and that, as usual, Miami Beach Chief of Police Peter Painter had claimed that an arrest was imminent. That was all Shayne knew about the case.

He looked up at Lucy and said, "I think the papers from the last few days are still out there, Angel. Bring them in, okay?"

Lucy nodded and hurried out. Shayne said, "Is your son still in jail?"

Mrs. Reyes nodded, and Shayne saw the shine of tears beginning to form in her eyes. "The police told us there would be no bail until after a hearing. He must stay in jail until then."

Lucy came back in carrying several sections of newspaper. She handed them to Shayne, saying, "Tim's story has most of the details."

Shayne scanned his old friend's article rapidly, digesting the information it contained. The murder victim had been a twenty-two-year-old Puerto Rican named Paco Cruz, and he had been stabbed repeatedly with a thin-bladed knife which had not been found. From the lack of blood at the scene, police theorized that he had been killed elsewhere and then dumped on the beach sometime before dawn. Cruz had had a record of small-time crime, and the official position on the murder was that it had probably been a

falling-out among thieves. Chief Painter promised an arrest at any moment.

Shayne grunted and put the papers on his desk. The arrest had come, all right, according to Mrs. Reyes. He asked her, "When did they arrest your son?"

"This morning. A man who called himself Bolton and said he was a detective came to our house. He said that Emiliano had killed Paco." Her eyes dropped in what Shayne supposed was shame. "Emiliano tried to run. This man Bolton hit him, very hard." There was another pause. "He seemed to enjoy it."

He would, Shayne thought disgustedly. He knew Bolton from previous run-ins with Peter Painter and his men.

"I know that Emiliano would not have killed Paco," Mrs. Reyes said. "They were friends. He was very upset when he heard that Paco was dead."

Shayne ran a thumb along the line of his rugged jaw. "This Cruz was a small-time hood," he said. "Had Emiliano been in trouble with the law, too?"

Mrs. Reyes took a deep breath. After a moment, she answered, "Yes. The police took him in several times, to ask him about stolen cars and things like that, but they never kept him in jail before. The other things were not his fault. He made friends with the wrong people."

Shayne had heard that same

tired story many times, but he couldn't say as much to this distraught woman, who obviously believed it. Naturally, she felt that her son was innocent. He asked. "Did they say what made them think Emiliano was guilty?"

"They had witnesses who said that Emiliano and Paco had argued on the night before Paco was killed. And Emiliano did not come home last night. There is no one to prove where he really was."

Shayne's brow creased again. "That's just circumstantial evidence. Still, I'm not surprised that Painter had him picked up. The D.A. might even get a conviction with it, unless something else turns up."

Mrs. Reyes leaned forward. "My son is innocent, Mr. Shayne! He would not, he *could not* kill anyone. You will help him, please? I — I will pay you all that I have ..."

Shayne glared. "Wait a minute. Who said anything about money? I'll look into this for you. Peter Painter has made plenty of mistakes in the past, and he probably has this time, too. I'll try to find out what happened to Paco Cruz, and then we'll talk about money."

Mrs. Reyes smiled for the first time since Lucy had shown her in to the office, and her dark eyes lit up. "Thank you, Mr. Shayne. Miss Hamilton has said such wonderful things about you. I knew you would help Emiliano."

"Yeah, I guess Miss Hamilton

does think I'm pretty wonderful," he said wryly, quirkling an eyebrow at Lucy, who was studying the floor of the office intently. "Tell me more about your son and Cruz," he went on in a more serious tone.

"They had been friends for several years, ever since Emiliano and I came here from Puerto Rico. Last year, they both got jobs working on the same boat, a yacht named the *Francesca*. Emiliano liked his job, and his boss, Mr. Patterson, always said he was a good worker."

"Who is this Patterson?"

"Mr. Owen Patterson, the owner of the boat. He told me once that Emiliano was a fine deck hand. Emiliano likes the sea."

Shayne jotted down Patterson's name for future reference and then asked, "Who told the police about Emiliano and Cruz arguing?"

"Some people at a bar they went to, a place called the Golden Parrot. I did not like Emiliano going there, but since his father died several years ago, he does not always do what I wish."

After a few more routine questions and answers, Shayne said, "All right, I think I've got enough to work with now. I'll check everything out for you, Mrs. Reyes."

"I should wait here, you think?"

Shayne stood up. "No, I'll be in touch with you whenever I

find out something. Right now, I think the best thing for you to do would be go home and try to get some rest. You look like this has been rough on you."

She stood up and sighed. "I have tried to raise Emiliano well." Her eyes were full of fear and desperation as she looked up at Shayne. "I hope you can help him."

"So do I," he said, and meant it.

After Lucy had ushered Mrs. Reyes out, she came back into the office and asked, "Do you think you can help her, Michael?"

He propped a hip on the corner of the desk and pulled absently at the lobe of his left ear. "I don't know, Angel," he said bluntly. "Naturally, she doesn't want to believe it, but her son *could* be guilty as charged. If that's the case, there's nothing I can do about it." He fell silent for a moment, then went on, "Painter has screwed up a lot of cases before, though, and I get the feeling he might be looking for an easy way out here. This killing isn't important to him. Solving the murder of a Puerto Rican kid isn't going to put any feathers in his cap. Why should he look any farther than the most obvious suspect?"

He plucked his hat up and continued, "Find out whatever you can about this Owen Patterson that Emiliano worked for, then go ahead and close up. I'll

call you at home later."

"Where are you going now?"

"Directly to jail. And on this case, I don't think I'll be collecting any two hundred dollars."

II

SHAYNE HAD VISITED CLIENTS in the Dade County jail before, and he hadn't liked it then, either. He settled his rangy frame onto a hard wooden chair and looked at Emiliano Reyes, seated across from him on the other side of a wire screen. Reyes had his mother's dark eyes, and they were fixed intently on the scarred wooden counter.

The redheaded detective studied the young man for a long moment, then said, "Mike Shayne. I'm a private detective. Your mother wants me to help you."

"You can't help me," Reyes said shortly. "The cops got it in their heads that I killed Paco, and they ain't going to believe nothing else."

"Did you kill him?" Shayne asked, his voice hard and flat.

"Hell, no, man! Paco was my friend," Reyes exclaimed, as if that alone was proof enough of his innocence.

"Cut it out," Shayne growled. "That doesn't mean a thing. Give me some hard facts to work with."

Reyes ran a hand over his jet black hair and looked around at the dingy interview room. His eyes

paused on the closed door, as if they could see through it to the guard outside.

"I've heard of you, Shayne," he said. "Why does a hotshot like you want to help a nobody like me? How much is my mother paying you?"

"I told her not to worry about money now."

Reyes smiled bitterly. "Don't jack up the price too much, Shayne. She ain't got much money."

Shayne's big fists clenched involuntarily. He wished that the screen wasn't there so that he could reach out and shake a little sense into Emiliano Reyes. Instead, he grated, "Don't be a damn fool. I'm here to help you, but if you don't want it, I can walk out and let Peter Painter hang you!"

Reyes flushed in anger. Shayne's cold gray eyes held their intent stare, and after a moment, Reyes looked away. In a more subdued tone, he said, "Hey, okay, man. I appreciate the help. But I don't think there's much you can do."

"Let me worry about that. Right now, just tell me about you and Cruz."

"Like I said, he was my friend. Sometimes he did things that weren't so smart, things I didn't like, but that don't matter. Him and me, we were still friends."

Shayne lit a cigarette. The mesh in the screen was just big enough

to allow him to slip one through to Reyes. Shayne lit it, too, and asked, "These things that Cruz did, would they be things like an occasional burglary or stolen car?"

Reyes puffed gratefully on the cigarette and said, "What's it matter? He's dead. Can't send him to jail now. Just me."

"If you're innocent, I don't want them sending you to jail, either."

Reyes shrugged, as if the matter was out of his hands, which in truth it was. Shayne was his only hope, and he was beginning to realize it.

Shayne said, "Tell me about the argument that you and Cruz had at the Golden Parrot."

"My mama tell you about that?" When Shayne nodded, Reyes went on, "She doesn't like me going there. I guess it finally got me in trouble, all right. The argument, though, was really nothing. We just had a little too much to drink."

"What was it about?"

"I told you, man, nothing. Just arguing, like friends do sometimes."

Shayne had no trouble sensing the evasiveness in Reyes's answer. He made a guess and asked, "Was it about a woman?"

Reyes laughed without sounding very amused. "No way. We didn't argue over women. We liked different types."

"What happened after the argument?"

"Paco left the bar about ten o'clock. I stayed and had a few more drinks. I got to feeling bad, but I didn't want to go home. My mama yells at me when I come home drunk. I slept in the park instead."

Shayne pulled at his earlobe as he asked, "So you didn't know that Cruz had been killed until the next day?"

"Not until I read about it in the paper, and that's the truth. I was sorry about it. He was my friend, no matter what he did."

No matter what he did ... That was an interesting phrase. Shayne filed it away mentally, knowing that Paco Cruz's activities would bear some investigating.

Shayne pointed at a bruise and a scratch on Reyes' forehead. "The cops give you that?"

"Yeah, the one called Bolton. He's the one in charge of the case. I guess I got kind of shook up when they came to arrest me. They scared the hell out of Mama. I don't like that."

"Neither do I," Shayne grunted. He had found himself liking Mrs. Reyes, who had no doubt had a rough time of it, coming to Miami from Puerto Rico as a widow with a son to raise on her own. His admiration for her was one reason he was there, along with wanting to please Lucy and frustrate Peter Painter at the same time if possible.

"Do you have any idea who

would want to kill Cruz?" he asked.

Reyes shook his head. "There were some people he didn't get along with, some of the guys who hung around the Golden Parrot, but the cops said they checked them all out. You ask me, they don't care. They got me to hang this on. Why bother with anybody else?"

The boy was bitter, all right, maybe with justification. Shayne put his cigarette out in a battered ashtray and said, "There's such a thing as justice."

"So I hear."

Shayne pushed his chair back abruptly and stood up. He said in a tight voice, "Look, kid, I'm going to bust my butt to find out who really killed Cruz, because I don't think you did. No thanks necessary." He spun on his heel to walk out.

"Mr. Shayne ... " Reyes called after him. "Hey, man, I'm sorry. After a while, you just get to where you don't trust people, you know?"

Shayne stopped and then came back to the screen slowly. He said, "All right. Just so we know where we stand." A new tack might be appropriate right now, he thought. "Your mother said you were a deck hand on a yacht?"

Reyes' face brightened momentarily. "Yeah, the *Francesca*. A hell of a boat, man. Best job I ever had, too. Beats the hell out of picking fruit."

"What about your boss, Owen Patterson?"

Reyes shrugged. "He's okay, for a rich guy. He pays pretty good, long as you do your job. He's not too friendly with the hired help, though."

"Did he and Cruz get along?"

Reyes' dark eyes cut away from Shayne's. "I guess so. I never heard Patterson yelling at Paco or anything."

Shayne knew that there was more there than Reyes was telling him. He had been vague about the argument, and now he was nervous about Patterson. As facts, they weren't much, just enough to make Shayne curious. He tucked them both away, to be looked into later.

The redhead nodded and said, "All right, Emiliano. I'm going to get out of here and get busy now. I'll try to talk to you again before too long. Hang in there."

"Where are you going to start?"

"I thought I'd talk to a few of your friends down at the Golden Parrot."

Reyes shook his head. "That's a tough place, Mr. Shayne. A lot of those guys won't like somebody coming around and asking a bunch of questions, especially a white guy."

"Maybe not." It was clear that that wasn't going to stop Shayne. He turned to leave again and made it to the door this time before Reyes stopped him.

"Mr. Shayne ... Thanks, man."

Shayne nodded and gave the boy a tight smile as he went out, but as he went into the corridor outside, deep furrows appeared in his cheeks. Believing in Reyes' innocence and proving it were two different things.

III

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON now as Shayne left the jail. The mist had stopped, leaving the air heavy and damp. Shayne climbed into his Buick and headed for the Golden Parrot.

Shayne reviewed what he had learned from Emiliano Reyes as he drove, and the big detective found himself feeling none too optimistic. Emiliano's lack of an alibi and the witnesses to the argument were enough to be damning, or at least they appeared to be. Casting doubt wouldn't be good enough for Shayne's purposes. He would have to come up with the killer of Paco Cruz and some cold facts to back it up before Emiliano would be cleared.

There was no section of Miami that Mike Shayne did not know and know well. Still, he didn't frequent the area in which the Golden Parrot was located, so it took him a little while to locate it. When he had, he found a parking place a block away and returned to it on foot.

The Golden Parrot was an older building, sitting by itself with a

vacant lot on each side. It was squat and ugly, painted a faded brown, with the paint beginning to peel off the stucco. Neon tubes were twisted into a shape approximating that of a bird on one wall of the building, and they glowed weakly, showing Shayne that several sections were burned out. Altogether, it was a seedy place, typical of this part of town. Someone with a fainter heart than Shayne's Irish one would have probably avoided it entirely.

Several cars were parked in one of the lots beside the building. Shayne strode past them and pushed through the door into the club. Lights and noise hit him immediately.

The lights were the flashing, flickering glare of a strobe set in one corner, and the noise was overly amplified *salsa* coming from a jukebox set under the strobes. There were few other lights, which served to hide the rundown condition of the place.

A bar ran along one wall, with quite a few drinkers sitting in front of it. Several pairs of dark eyes turned toward Shayne as he crossed the room toward the bar, taking his time and acting perfectly at ease.

A florid-faced, heavyset bartender faced him over the polished wood and said in none too friendly tones, "What you want, man?"

Shayne paused deliberately to light a cigarette before answering, "Martell. Ice water on the side."

The bartender shook his head. "No fancy stuff like that here."

"Just information, then."

The man's thin lips turned up in what passed for a smile. He said, "You must be new on the force. You won't get no information here."

It was Shayne's turn to shake his head. "I'm not a cop. I'm looking for somebody who knew Paco Cruz."

The bartender's eyes widened. "Forget it, man. I already talked to the cops about that, and they got the killer. You better get on outta here now."

"You saw Cruz arguing with Emiliano Reyes?"

"Hell, yes, man! Everybody who was here that night saw them."

None of the patrons of the bar had interfered yet, but Shayne knew that they were listening to every word. He said, "Do you know if Cruz had any other enemies?"

A new voice answered from behind him. "The man said you better get out of here. Why don't you do like he says?"

Shayne turned slowly, taking a drag on his cigarette as he did so. The young man behind him was in his early twenties, about the same age as Emiliano Reyes, and his eyes were cold as they regarded Shayne. He was slim and nearly as tall as Shayne, and his clothes were a cut above the working garb of the bar's other

customers. Despite his youth, Shayne pegged him as an important person in this part of town.

"I'm just trying to help someone out," Shayne said slowly.

"Yeah? Since when does the Man try to help anybody but himself?"

"Do you know Emiliano Reyes?"

The youth shrugged. "Sure, I know him. He's the guy who cut up Paco Cruz."

"Are you sure of that?"

"That's what the cops say. You *know* they're never wrong."

"I'm working for Emiliano's mother. I'm trying to prove that he's innocent."

Lips curled, the young man said, "Yeah, sure. I don't believe you, man, but who gives a damn about that. All I know is that your kind ain't wanted here." A fierce glitter came into his eyes. "Feels kind of good to say that for a change, instead of being told."

Shayne considered rapidly. If he was going to make any headway in this case, he was going to have to start getting more information than he had been getting. He wanted answers, and this was one place he might get them. But to stay might mean a confrontation against odds that weren't too favorable to him ...

That had never stopped Shayne before, and he knew that it wasn't going to this time, either. He said coolly, "I'm not going anywhere

until I've found out what I want to know."

The young man looked almost pleased. He gave a low laugh. "You'll find out, all right."

His hand made a quick movement, almost too fast for Shayne's eyes to follow. Someone pulled the plug on the jukebox, and there was a *snick*, plainly audible in the sudden silence. The switchblade in the man's hand had made the noise as it snapped open.

Shayne's jaw tightened. The strobe struck glints of broken light off the shiny blade. Shayne jerked his eyes away from it, wary of its mesmerizing effect.

"Those things are illegal," he said quietly as he moved just enough to put the bar solidly at his back. He didn't like having the bartender behind him, but it couldn't be helped.

The other customers were on their feet now, moving steadily closer and watching eagerly as the young man began to weave the knife in front of him in slow, easy patterns. One of them called out softly, "Cut the bastard, Rubio!"

Shayne's fingers itched to go for the .38 nestled in its holster under his arm, but he knew that the young man called Rubio could slash his throat before the gun was halfway out.

"Have you changed your mind about leaving, *amigo*?" Rubio asked mockingly.

Shayne kept his voice even.

"No, I still want some answers to my questions."

"Here's your answer!"

Rubio's arm darted forward with the cry. Shayne threw himself to one side. He heard the ripping of cloth as the knife tore into his coat.

Shayne's pantherish speed belied his size. Rubio was obviously surprised as Shayne's arm shot out and his big hand clamped down, the fingers encircling Rubio's elbow.

Shayne dug his fingers in, the powerful grip grating bones together in the joint. Rubio yelped in pain as Shayne bore down on the pressure points. His fingers had no choice but to open up.

With his free hand, Shayne plucked the knife out of Rubio's limp grasp. He shoved the young Puerto Rican away and then turned to the bar. He plunged the blade into the wood and grasped the hilt, ready to snap it off...

Then suddenly, Shayne jerked the knife back up, closed it, and tossed it to the shaken Rubio. He growled, "It's a damn good knife, even if it is against the law. Just don't try to use it on me again."

A swish of air behind his head warned him of new danger. He spun around and jerked his head to the side at the same time. The blackjack that the bartender was swinging barely grazed off of Shayne's left shoulder.

The redhead reached over the

bar and tangled his fingers in the man's shirt, jerking him forward. There was a sharp crack as Shayne's right fist met the bartender's jaw solidly. When Shayne let him go, he folded up behind the bar, as limp as the rag he used to polish it.

Shayne faced back around to find the ring of patrons closing in on him, their faces ugly with anger. This was going to be bad, and Shayne realized with disgust that he had botched things. He would have no choice but to go for his gun now. The mood they were in, they could easily take him down and not stop until he was dead.

He was just about to make a grab for his .38 when Rubio rapped out several words in sharp Spanish. Shayne understood enough of the language to know that he was telling them to stop, ordering them to back off.

Rubio stepped up to Shayne, still holding the closed knife in his hand. He said quietly, "My brother gave me this knife ten years ago. Then he went off to Vietnam and never came back. You're the first one who ever took it off me. Be glad you didn't break it."

Shayne didn't say anything.

"You're a big man," Rubio went on. "You usually get what you go after, don't you?"

"Usually," Shayne grated.

"I figure we're even. You could have broken my brother's knife,

and we could have broken your head. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough. Now will you answer my questions?"

Rubio threw back his head and laughed. "Hell, man, if that's the only way we can get rid of you. Come on, you talk to me. I know everything that goes on around here."

The other men went sullenly back to their drinks as Shayne followed Rubio over to a booth. They sat down and the Puerto Rican said, "All right, what's so important about Paco Cruz that you have to know?"

"You were here the night he was killed?"

"Yeah, sitting right here, as a matter of fact. Cruz and Reyes were two booths away, right over there."

"You heard them arguing?"

"Sure, like Frankie over there said, everybody in the joint heard them."

Shayne leaned forward. "Do you know what they were arguing about?"

"How's telling you that going to help Reyes?"

"I'm just digging for any information I can get right now," Shayne answered honestly. "I'm looking for somebody else with a motive to kill Cruz."

Rubio smiled, but it wasn't a pleasant expression. "I didn't like the guy myself. Nobody did but Emiliano. That Paco, he was always a strange one. He'd do

damn near anything as long as there was money or a kick in it. Reyes tried to keep him from getting into too much trouble."

Shayne steered him back to the earlier question. "How about the argument?"

Rubio spread his hands. "Hell, I couldn't really say. They got kind of loud part of the time, but it was just cursing. They were both mad, though, and I told the cops as much."

"Did they mention any names?"

"Not that I heard."

"Can you remember anything in particular that they said?"

"I don't know ... I didn't pay too much attention to them. They were both drunk, not making too much sense." Rubio thought for a moment, trying to remember, then went on, "I think Reyes said something like 'He won't go for that, man,' and then Paco cussed some more and called somebody a name and said, 'He won't have no choice.' Paco kept talking about big money, but I didn't pay no attention to that, he was always talking about getting rich."

"Did Reyes threaten him?"

"He told him he'd wind up dead. I'd call that a threat."

Wheels were turning in the big redhead's brain, trying to sort the information out and make it fit some sort of a pattern. "Did the two of them leave the bar together?" he asked.

"No, Paco left first. He was

really steamed at Reyes. Reyes stayed a little while longer, then he left, too." Rubio was looking intently at Shayne. "Hey, just who the hell are you, man? You look familiar."

"The name's Mike Shayne."

Rubio's face lit up for a second as he forgot his earlier hostility. "I read about you in the paper!" he exclaimed. "You're that fancy private eye who's always busting the big crooks. Why's somebody like you breaking a sweat over an *hombre* like Emiliano Reyes?"

"Because his mother asked me to," Shayne answered simply. "And I'm glad you decided to help me."

There was a grudging admiration in Rubio's eyes. He said slowly, "Don't get me wrong; Reyes was no big friend of mine. But I don't want to see nobody in jail that don't belong there, and if you're on his side, then maybe he don't belong there." He stood up, signalling an end to the interview. "Listen, I carry some weight around here. Anybody gives you trouble, you tell 'em that Rubio Gorro vouches for you, okay?"

"Sure," Shayne said, getting to his feet. He stuck a big, rough hand out. "Thanks for talking to me, and for calling off the massacre."

Rubio Gorro hesitated, then shook hands briefly. "*Denada*. It might be a good idea for you not to come down here again."

"Not unless I have to," Shayne agreed.

He got quite a few glares as he stalked out of the Golden Parrot, but evidently the conversation with Rubio Gorro had established him as a man to be left alone. No one said a word to him as he went out into the dusk.

When he was back in his car and heading in the general direction of his office, he considered the things he had learned. Paco Cruz, with a history of shady doings, had evidently been in the middle of some scheme that he thought would make him rich. All small-timers harbored the hope of someday hitting the big time. Whatever the scheme was, his friend Emiliano Reyes had tried to talk him out of it, making Paco angry. If Emiliano had followed him and kept badgering him about it, Paco could have pulled a knife and there could have been a struggle ...

Shayne shook his red head. That took him right back to where he had started and kept Emiliano's head on the chopping block. It was time to pick up another thread and see where it would lead.

IV

NIGHT WAS ABOUT TO FALL on Miami. Shayne wheeled his Buick into its slot in the garage and went up in the elevator to his office, dark now that Lucy had gone.

Shayne went into the inner office and sat down behind the desk, not bothering to take off his hat. He didn't intend to be there long. Taking a glass and the office bottle from the desk, he poured a small shot of Martell and downed it before lighting a cigarette. Then he turned the phone around and dialed rapidly with a blunt finger.

Lucy answered on the second ring. Shayne said, "It's me, Angel. What did you find out about Owen Patterson?"

"Not very much, I'm afraid, Michael. I called Tim and asked him, and this is what he told me. Owen Patterson manufactures plastic pipe for industrial use. Most of his customers are oil companies, and he's made quite a lot of money. His social standing is good, but he's something of a recluse. Tim didn't know of anything negative about him."

"What about his family?"

"One son, Stephen. His first wife died years ago, and now he's married to a woman named Francesca. The yacht that Emiliano and Paco worked on must have been named for her. The son is a vice-president in Patterson's corporation, the wife is a well-thought-of socialite. I'm sorry, Michael, but that's all I was able to find out."

It seemed like a damn good job of information gathering to Shayne, but Lucy was naturally modest about her talents. He said,

"That's fine, Angel. That gives me the background I need. I'm going to pay a visit to Patterson."

"Did you talk to Emiliano?"

"Yeah, and to some people down at the Golden Parrot who were there the night of the argument. What they told me jibes with the story the police got. Emiliano couldn't help much. He claims he was drunk and spent the night in the park. He was evasive about what the argument was about, though, and that's got me curious. I get the impression from everything I've heard that Cruz was up to something illegal."

"Do you have any idea what it was?"

"Not yet." Shayne stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray. "Did you get Patterson's address?"

Lucy gave it to him, and he jotted it down in his notebook. He said, "I'll take a run by Patterson's place and then pick you up for some dinner, all right?"

He could almost see the smile on her face as she agreed. Shayne said his goodbyes and then hung up. He switched off the lights in the office and locked the door behind him.

Owen Patterson lived in the exclusive Bal Harbour area, as Shayne would have expected of someone that wealthy. Early evening traffic was fairly heavy on the streets of Miami, so it took Shayne a while to get there. He used the time to continue turning things over in his mind. He kept

going back to the two phrases that Rubio Gorro claimed to have overheard during the argument between Emiliano and Cruz.

He won't go for that ... He won't have no choice ...

To Shayne, that didn't sound like Cruz had been planning a simple burglary or auto heist. It sounded more like they were discussing either extortion or blackmail, and Shayne knew that Owen Patterson, with his money and social standing, might possibly have been a target for either one.

Shayne knew that he was just theorizing, with nothing to back it up yet, but if Paco Cruz had had something on Owen Patterson and tried to use it as leverage in some scheme, Patterson could have been behind the Puerto Rican's death. It was a plausible line of reasoning, and he hadn't come up with anything better so far. Patterson would warrant as thorough an investigation as possible.

Finding the pipe magnate's house was no trouble. It was huge and white and sat behind a carefully landscaped lawn that was surrounded by a high wrought iron fence. Getting in was another matter entirely. The gates were closed and locked.

There was a bell push and an intercom on a post beside the gates. Shayne parked the Buick, got out, and jabbed a finger on the bell. A response came after a moment.

"Yes?" The voice was metallic

as it came over the speaker. Shayne couldn't tell the gender of it for sure, but he suspected female.

"I'd like to see Mr. Patterson," he said.

"Which Mr. Patterson?"

Evidently the son, Stephen, lived here too. Shayne said, "Owen Patterson, please."

"Mr. Patterson isn't here at the moment. I'm sorry."

Shayne didn't care for standing around on a street corner talking to a box, but there didn't seem to be much choice. Quickly, before the person on the other end of the intercom could shut it off, he said, "Could I speak to Stephen Patterson, then?"

"Do you have an appointment?"

Shayne swallowed his irritation and said, "No, but I just need to talk to him for a few minutes."

"I'm sorry, but since you don't have an appointment —"

A new voice cut in, evidently on another intercom unit. "Let the man in, Melissa. That's Mike Shayne."

Shayne looked sharply up at the house. A figure was standing at one of the lighted windows on the second floor. He was holding something up to his face, and Shayne guessed correctly that it was a pair of binoculars.

Shayne wondered fleetingly how the figure would react to a little blunt sign language, then the first voice came back on the speaker

and said, "Very well. Wait for the buzzer, Mr. Shayne."

There was a buzzing noise a second later, and the lock on the gates snapped open. They swung back in response to an electronic command. Shayne got back in his car and drove through the opening, following the circular drive up to the house.

The big front door opened as he was getting out of his car, and the man who had been using the binoculars was waiting for him there. He was in his early thirties, with dark hair and a grin on his broad, open face. He stuck out a hand and said excitedly, "My God, Mike Shayne in person! This is an honor. I'm Stephen Patterson. Call me Corky."

Shayne shook Corky Patterson's hand and said, "I appreciate your giving me a little of your time."

"Glad to. I don't know what a private detective wants with me, but I'm happy to talk to one like you. Hell, I've been reading Tim Rourke's stories about you for years."

There was a definite note of hero worship in Patterson's voice. Shayne shrugged it off and said, "I'm looking into a murder that involves someone who worked for your father."

"Of course, Emiliano Reyes! The police talked to all of us, of course. I was sorry to hear that Emiliano was in trouble. I always liked him."

"How well do you know him?"

"Well, just from seeing him around the boat. He was a good worker, pleasant to be around. We never really talked much, if that's what you mean."

"Do you think he could have killed somebody?"

Patterson spread his hands. "Who knows? They say anybody's capable of it, under the right circumstances. Say, how about a drink? Martell, right?"

Shayne had to grin slightly at the young man's enthusiasm. "Yeah, that's right. Ice water on the side."

Patterson led the way further into the big house, taking Shayne into an elegantly furnished parlor with a well-stocked liquor cabinet. As he was fixing Shayne's drink, a door on the other side of the room opened and a tall woman came in, looking slightly surprised at Shayne's presence. She murmured, "Sorry, Corky, I didn't know you had company."

"That's all right, Francesca. Come in and meet Mike Shayne, the private detective."

The woman came forward and offered Shayne a smooth, cool hand, which the redhead shook gladly. Corky Patterson said, "This is my stepmother Francesca, Mr. Shayne."

Francesca Patterson was hardly older than her stepson. She was wearing a green silk lounging outfit that went well with her fair skin and raven hair. Shayne's gaze was

frankly admiring, but she didn't seem to mind.

"Are you the one that's in the paper all the time, Mr. Shayne?" she asked. Her eyes were doing a little admiring of their own as she ran them over his athletic form and ruggedly handsome face.

"They seem to think I'm good copy," Shayne answered, as Patterson handed him his drink. He sampled it approvingly, then said, "I was just asking Corky here about Emiliano Reyes."

Her face became more serious. "Yes, that business took all of us by surprise. We didn't know that there was bad blood between Emiliano and Paco."

"Did you know them well?"

"Just as employees of my husband's. We all used the yacht quite a bit, so of course we saw them."

Corky had fixed a drink of his own, and now he joined Shayne and Francesca. He said, "Just what's your interest in this, Mr. Shayne? I thought the police had everything cleared up, that it was all cut and dried."

"Maybe, maybe not. I'm trying to find out if anyone else might have had a motive to kill Paco Cruz." He turned back to Francesca. "Do you know when I might be able to talk to your husband?"

Corky spoke before she could answer. "My father is away on a business trip, and we never know for sure how long they're going to

last. Why do you want to talk to him?"

Shayne considered, wondering how much to tell these two. He decided to play it fairly straight. If Owen Patterson had nothing to hide, no harm would be done. On the other hand, if he had something he wanted to keep covered up, Shayne's interest might flush him out into the open. The big red-head said bluntly, "I think Paco Cruz might have been planning some sort of crime. Could it have been directed at your father?"

Corky looked doubtful. "I don't know, Mr. Shayne; that sounds pretty unlikely to me. Cruz just worked on the boat. He didn't handle any of Dad's money."

"I'm talking about possibly blackmail or extortion."

Both of them shook their heads. Francesca said, "I don't think anyone could blackmail Owen. There's nothing in his business that isn't open and above board."

"And nothing in his past, either," Corky added. "I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne, but I think you're on the wrong trail here."

"Could be," Shayne nodded. "I have to check all the angles, though."

A soft footstep behind him made Shayne look back over his shoulder. A young woman had come into the room, and now she said, "There's a phone call for you, Mr. Patterson." Shayne recognized the voice as the one that had come

over the intercom outside.

"All right, Melissa," Patterson said, putting his drink down. "I'll be right back, Mr. Shayne."

Melissa was slender and blonde, and Shayne thought that he had seldom seen a better-looking pair of women than she and Francesca Patterson. Melissa moved around where she could get a better look at him and said, "Well, aren't you going to introduce us, Francesca?"

Francesca's mouth tightened, and Shayne could almost see the sparks of antagonism that were flashing between these two. Francesca said, "This is Mike Shayne. Mr. Shayne, Melissa Davis. Melissa runs things around here."

"I'm personal secretary to Mr. and Mrs. Patterson," Melissa said. "I'd hardly say I run things."

Shayne nodded silently and then said, "I was just asking a few questions about Emiliano Reyes and Paco Cruz. Did you know them?"

"Are you with the police? I've already talked with them."

"I'm a private detective."

"Oh. Well, I know that those two men worked on Mr. Patterson's boat, but I'm afraid I didn't know them personally."

"Did you ever go out on the yacht, Miss Davis?"

Francesca Patterson laughed, and Shayne heard derision in the sound. "Melissa go out on the

water?" she said. "Not very likely, Mr. Shayne."

Melissa gave her a sharp look and said, "I tend to get seasick."

Shayne thought wryly that if you put boxing gloves on these two, it would probably turn out to be quite a spectacle. He supposed the enmity was only natural, though, with two beautiful women occupying the same house.

There didn't seem to be anything more to be gained here. He said, "I'd appreciate it if you'd let me know when Mr. Patterson gets back from his trip. I'd still like to talk to him."

Francesca put her hand on his arm and moved closer to him. She said softly, "I'll be sure to give you a call, Mr. Shayne. Melissa, dear, you won't have to worry about it. Honestly, though, I don't think Owen will be able to help you ... Just what is it exactly that you intend to do?"

"I'm going to prove that Emiliano Reyes is innocent," Shayne said, "and I'm going to do it by finding the real killer."

Both women looked surprised by his forthrightness. He hoped they would pass on what he had said to Owen Patterson.

Corky was still out of the room, and now Francesca turned to Melissa and said, "Don't you think you had better get back to work, dear?"

Melissa looked daggers at her employer, then turned on her heel and left the room without another

word. Francesca still had her hand on Shayne's arm, and as soon as the two of them were alone, she moved even closer, so that her body was almost pressed against the detective's tall, rangy form.

"Do you know," she said slowly, "I have never met a private detective before."

Shayne's grey eyes looked into her brown ones. He said, "We're just human beings, like everybody else."

"That's hard for me to believe. You're certainly special."

She was moving her fingers up his arm. Before Shayne could stop her, she had slipped her arm around his neck and lifted her lips to his, kissing him with exciting warmth.

Shayne didn't pull his mouth away, but he kept his arms at his side and didn't return the embrace she was giving him. As attractive as she was, he wasn't going to make a play for a married woman.

He heard the sound of a door opening, and suddenly Francesca jerked away from him, putting a respectable distance between them. Corky was standing in the door, and after an almost indiscernible pause, he came on into the room. He shook his head and put a weak smile on his lips. "These business calls," he said. "A necessary evil, I guess, but sometimes they're annoying."

Shayne wasn't sure how much the man had seen as he came into the room, but it seemed obvious

from the forced smile on his face that he had seen at least part of what had been going on. If he was a loyal son, it was no wonder that he was surprised and embarrassed to find his stepmother kissing someone besides his father.

"I'd better be going," Shayne said, finishing his drink. "Thanks for talking to me."

"I'll see you out, Mr. Shayne," Francesca said.

Corky looked like he wanted to say something, but he just smiled and nodded to Shayne instead. Francesca walked closely beside the redhead as he left the room and headed for the front door.

He said, "Goodbye, Mrs. Patterson," as he opened the door, then he went out to where he had left his Buick. He had his hand on the car door when she called out, "I was glad to meet you, Mr. Shayne. Be sure to come back anytime if there's anything I can do for you."

Shayne was muttering under his breath as he got in the car and started it up. He hadn't planned on an encounter with a predatory female like Francesca had turned out to be. The visit to the Patterson mansion might pay some dividends in the long run, though. If Owen Patterson was involved in anything shady, he wouldn't want Shayne poking his nose into things.

It was no fun setting yourself up as a target, Shayne mused, but sometimes it got good results.

As he piloted the car away from the house, he glanced in his side mirror and saw a downstairs window. The curtain behind it moved, and Shayne caught a glimpse of blonde hair for a second. Melissa Davis was watching him leave. He quirked a bushy red eyebrow. She was an interesting lady, too. If there was such obvious enmity between her and Francesca, how did she keep her job?

That was a point worth pondering. Even more so than Paco Cruz, Melissa Davis was in a position where a little blackmail might come in very handy.

V

SHAYNE HEADED for his apartment. He would grab a quick shower and a change of clothes before picking up Lucy. There didn't seem to be anything else he could do on the case tonight, and some relaxation and a good meal could possibly stimulate his mind and enable him to come up with a new angle.

After several minutes in the crosstown traffic, he swung off the street into the basement parking garage of his hotel. He found his usual place and tucked the Buick into it.

He heard another car door shut as he got out, and a harsh voice called out, "Hold it, Shayne! You and I got things to discuss."

Shayne turned around slowly

and saw a bulky figure making its way toward him through the parked cars. He recognized the rumpled suit and the less-than-pleasant face that was right now twisted into a scowl. Grimacing, Shayne said, "I didn't expect to run into you, Bolton. I'm glad I did, though. There's a few things I'd like to say to you."

Detective Bolton of the Miami Beach Police poked a spatulate finger into Shayne's chest. He growled, "They'll have to wait, shamus. I've got a personal message from Chief Painter to you. *Butt out!*"

Shayne looked down at the finger that Bolton was prodding him with and then raised his eyes slowly. His gaze had about as much warmth as a Norwegian fjord in it as he said, "Move that before I feed it to you."

Bolton pulled back slightly, then blustered, "You just remember what I said."

"I don't know what the hell you're babbling about, Bolton," Shayne said, even though he had a very good idea.

"The chief and I don't like you trying to mess up our cases. We heard you were over talking to that spick we picked up for stabbing his buddy."

"If you're talking about Emiliano Reyes, I went through channels to see him," Shayne declared. "Nothing wrong with that."

"There is if you're trying to ruin

our case against him."

"What if your case against him is wrong?"

Bolton spat on the concrete floor. "It ain't, Shayne. Hell, why should you care, anyway? Who does that kid know that can afford you?"

"How about his boss, Owen Patterson?"

Shayne was shooting from the hip with that one, but it seemed to score. Bolton evidently knew who Patterson was and respected his position and wealth. After a moment, he said, "If Patterson's got the wind up about this, how come the chief didn't tell me? Hell, it's my case."

"Maybe he thinks you're too dumb to handle anything except strong-arm stuff," Shayne suggested.

Bolton's hamlike fists clenched. "You'd better watch that goddam mouth of yours, Shayne."

Mike Shayne could feel his Irish temper beginning to boil up inside of him. He grated, "You were a little rough with the Reyes kid, weren't you, Bolton? I saw the marks you left on him. If you worked for anybody but a creep like Painter, you wouldn't get away with that garbage."

Bolton's face was getting redder. "I'm warning you, Shayne—"

"No, *I'm* warning you, you bastard!" Shayne flared. "You're in Will Gentry's bailiwick now, and Painter doesn't mean a thing.

You try to muscle me and you'll go back across the bay in an ambulance!"

The prodding was too much for Bolton, just like Shayne had hoped it would be. The brutal cop from across the bay grunted and swung a roundhouse right at Shayne's head.

Shayne slipped inside it deftly and peppered Bolton's stomach with quick blows. They moved Bolton back. He swung wildly again, and Shayne let the blow slide past him. While Bolton was off-balance, Shayne clipped him on the jaw expertly. Bolton staggered.

Shayne wanted this fight, wanted to pay Bolton back for what he had done to Emiliano Reyes. There weren't many things lower in Shayne's mind than a cop who abused his power.

Bolton pulled back suddenly, gasping for breath. The fight had been all Shayne's so far, but Bolton had realized finally that he was playing right into the red-head's hands.

"Damn ... you ..." Bolton puffed. "I'm going to take you apart, Shayne."

Shayne knew he would have to be more careful now that Bolton had come to his senses. The cop was big and had the street savvy that went with years on the force. Shayne knew he could take him, but it would be harder now that Bolton had overcome his wildness.

Bolton moved in slowly, feinting

cagily, but Shayne refused to fall for it. He made a move of his own. Bolton threw up an arm to block it, and Shayne sent his other hand in with a blow that thudded into Bolton's ribs.

Bolton grunted in pain, but he let fly with a punch that connected before Shayne could pull back. It bounced off the redhead's chest, and Shayne felt a twinge of pain. He hooked a right that Bolton took on his shoulder, and then Bolton scored again with a left to Shayne's belly.

The fluorescent lights of the garage cast a harsh glare on the battle. Neither of the men heard the street noises from outside. For long minutes, all they heard was the rasp of breath, the shuffle of quickly moving feet, the grunts of pain, the soggy thuds and sharp cracks of fist meeting flesh and bone.

Then Shayne shot home a particularly devastating combination, his left sinking deep into Bolton's stomach and his right crashing into Bolton's jaw with a resounding crack.

The big cop went staggering backwards for several feet, then after swaying for a few seconds, folded up face down on the concrete floor.

Shayne drew a deep breath and looked down at him. When he was sure that Bolton was still breathing, Shayne took a second to check his own wounds. His knuckles were scraped and would soon be

swelling, and he knew that his torso would be black and blue by morning, but there didn't seem to be any real damage done.

Bolton groaned and rolled over onto his back. As he struggled to sit up, Shayne looked down at him bleakly and said, "You never should have come over here to hassle me, Bolton. I don't like being hassled."

"Oh ... Lord ..." Bolton was hugging himself. "I think you must've broke something."

"I doubt it. You just remember this the next time you rough up a suspect."

Bolton looked up at Shayne with hatred glittering in his eyes. "I'm going to call Will Gentry!" he promised. "I'm going to tell him you assaulted me while I was performing my duties."

Shayne turned away and stalked over to the elevator, punching the button to summon it. Without turning around, he said over his shoulder, "Do what you damn well please, Bolton. You don't scare me."

Shayne could hear Bolton climbing to his feet behind him, accompanied by moans and groans, but he still didn't turn around as he waited for the elevator. The doors slid open a moment later, and Shayne stepped into the car, only then turning to look at Bolton.

The Miami Beach cop lurched over to stand in front of the elevator, pointing with the same finger

he had used to poke Shayne in the chest earlier. He rumbled, "You better stay the hell out of our town after I tell Painter about this, Shayne. You so much as *spit* over there and you won't ever see the outside of the station again!"

He kept on in the same vein as the elevator doors began to close, ranting and cursing. Shayne tried to ignore it. He looked over Bolton's shoulder and saw another car coming down the ramp into the garage. He started to look away from it ...

Then he saw the dark snout sticking out the window on the passenger side.

The next few seconds were busy ones. Shayne's arm shot out through the closing doors and his hand clamped down on Bolton's upper arm. He jerked the man toward him, even as Bolton was shocked into speechlessness.

The opening was barely wide enough for Bolton to pass through. He banged up against Shayne, and both of them reeled to the back of the small car. Shayne gave him a violent shove to one side even as he was snatching his gun out of its shoulder holster.

That was when the shooting started.

VI

A HEAVY BOOM RESOUNDED through the basement garage. Shayne heard the spatter of pellets

against the elevator doors and felt stinging sensations in his left arm and leg. He snapped up his .38 and sent slugs screaming back at the attackers in the car.

The shotgun blast had damaged the doors, and they stopped in their tracks, jamming and leaving an opening about a foot wide. Shayne threw himself to one side as the shotgun boomed again. This time all the pellets missed him.

Bolton was standing stunned in the other corner, not knowing what was going on. Shayne ducked back into the opening as he heard the screech of wheels and saw that the car had turned around and was headed out of the garage now. As he watched, the shotgun poked its nose out again.

Shayne triggered off his last shots and saw the side window on the car shatter. The shotgun jerked up toward the ceiling and blasted a final time. Shayne knew that his bullets had caused the shotgunner to duck, if nothing more.

Bolton came to his sense enough to scream, "*What the hell is going on?*"

"Somebody just tried to kill us," Shayne grated, as he slapped the button on the control panel that was supposed to open the doors. He could hear the mechanism whining, but the doors weren't moving. Through the gap, he could see the attack car roaring up the ramp and out onto the street.

Shayne kept his fingers on the OPEN button and put a shoulder against one of the doors. He braced a big foot against the other one and shoved with all the strength in his powerful form. With a screech of protest, the doors sprang open.

Shayne left Bolton in the wrecked elevator to count his toes and raced down the aisle between parked cars. He thundered up the ramp, paying no heed to the minor wounds on his arm and leg.

Several pedestrians were standing around looking scared and excited. They had heard the artillery open up in the basement and then seen the car come speeding out. Now the car was followed by a big, wild-eyed red-head carrying a gun.

"Which way did that car go?" Shayne rapped, and got a shaking indication from a middle-aged man. Shayne caught a glimpse of speeding taillights that were already many blocks away. He cursed under his breath as they turned a corner and disappeared.

"Anybody get the license plate number?" he asked the crowd in general.

"It didn't have a plate," one woman said.

That figured. A stolen car, most likely, with the plates removed. The people in the car had known what they were doing.

Bolton came puffing up behind him and demanded, "What the hell was that all about, Shayne?"

Shayne turned a disgusted eye on him. "Somebody was shooting at us with a shotgun, Bolton. Surely your keen mind can comprehend that much."

Bolton began to bluster, but Shayne turned and walked away, holstering his gun. Since he was on the street level now, the red-head stalked into the lobby of the hotel. The desk clerk looked frantic from all the commotion. Shayne caught his eye and said, "When the cops get here, send them up to my apartment."

His long legs carried him up the stairs, since the elevator would need major repairs before it would work again. The wounds he had received from the shotgun pellets were starting to sting now. When he came into this apartment, he dropped his hat on the telephone table and took stock of the situation.

There were patches of blood in three places on his leg, with two more on his arm. He headed for the bathroom, stripping off his clothes as he went.

He was down to his shorts by time he got into the bathroom, and he stood in front of the mirror as he looked at the pellet marks.

Luck had been riding with him in the elevator. All the wounds were clean and small, more like deep grazes than bullet holes. He dropped his shorts on the floor, turned the shower on as hot as he could stand it, and stood under the

spray for long minutes, soaking his weary body.

After he had towelled dry, he applied disinfectant to the wounds, grimacing and muttering a curse under his breath as the fiery stuff burned.

The doorbell rang then. Shayne shrugged into a robe and answered it, admitting two uniformed cops. One of them said, "The desk clerk told us to come see you about what happened, Mr. Shayne."

"Yeah," Shayne said, going over to his liquor cabinet and grasping a bottle of Martell by the neck. He went on as he splashed the liquid into a tumbler, "It was me that the guy in the car was shooting at."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Pretty sure. I guess they could have been after Bolton, but I doubt it. And we were the only ones down there right then."

The cops tried to suppress their smiles. "We ran into Bolton downstairs. He claims you ambushed him and tried to assault him. Painter is going to have your hide, according to him."

Shayne's lips quirked into a crooked grin. "Bolton's full of it. There was no ambush. He just tried to muscle me around, and I took exception to it."

"Can you give us a description of the car?"

"I didn't get a very good look at it. Dark color, fairly late model midsize sedan. That's the best I

can do. You probably could get more from some of the people who were on the street when it came tearing out of there."

One of the cops nodded. "We've already talked to them. Most of them agree that the car didn't have any plates. There seems to have been two men in it, the driver and the shotgunner, and one of the bystanders got a pretty good look at them, claims he'd recognize them again."

"He give you a description?" Shayne asked eagerly.

"Sort of. He said they were both Latin Americans."

Shayne's fingers tightened on the tumbler of cognac.

Most of the Latin Americans in Miami were Puerto Ricans, like Emiliano Reyes and Paco Cruz ... and Rubio Gorro. Shayne had been under the impression that he had struck a sort of truce with the tough young Puerto Rican. But he *had* bested Gorro, and that defeat in the bar could have left a smoldering desire for revenge.

Another thought suddenly struck him. He could be on the wrong track, trying to connect Paco Cruz's death with Owen Patterson. Rubio Gorro could have been involved in it, in which case he certainly wouldn't want Shayne sticking his nose in it. The whole business of supposedly cooperating in the Golden Parrot could have been just to throw Shayne off the trail.

"Mr. Shayne? Something wrong?"

Shayne realized that he had been standing there frowning and pulling at his earlobe as he thought, ignoring the cops who were still standing just inside the door. He waved a hand and said, "Sorry, boys, I was just running some things through what passes for a brain. What else did you want to know?"

They asked a few more routine questions, and Shayne answered them as best he could. They didn't ask if he was working on a case at the moment, and Shayne didn't volunteer the information.

"We'll file our report, Mr. Shayne. Chief Gentry may have some questions he wants to ask you."

"Will knows where to find me most of the time. Thanks, fellows. I don't think you'll have much luck finding that car. If you do, the bastards inside it will be long gone."

They nodded in grudging agreement and left. Shayne tossed down the rest of his drink and then dressed rapidly. He still had a dinner date to keep.

Lucy was waiting for him. She greeted him at the door of her apartment with a warm smile and hello, then asked, "Did you get to see Owen Patterson?"

"No, but I talked to his wife and son and secretary." Shayne's leg was stiffening up slightly from the wounds, and he tried to

disguise that fact as he walked over to Lucy's sofa. "They couldn't tell me much that was any help. Reyes and Cruz were just employees to them."

Lucy's brown eyes may have been soft and lovely, but they were also observant. She said sharply, "Something's happened, Michael. What is it?"

Shayne heaved a weary sigh. Lucy knew the hazards of his profession as well as anyone and better than most, but she still worried about him. He didn't like to give her more to worry about than necessary. Still, he knew she wouldn't rest until she found out what had happened.

"Someone came after me with a shotgun a little earlier, Angel," he said. "I took a couple of pellets, but they just scratched me. Nothing to worry about."

Her eyes had widened as he spoke. She hurried over to the sofa and sat down beside him, saying, "Nothing to worry about? Someone shoots you and you say it's nothing to worry about?"

He could see a tiny trembling running through her. He put his hands out, grasping her shoulders gently. In a low voice, he said, "It's all right, really. They were just scratches. I took care of them, and I'll let a doctor look at them as soon as I get a chance."

She came into his arms and pillowed her head on his shoulder for a moment, letting his embrace tighten around her. Then she

raised her head, her inner strength showing on her face again, and said, "Tell me about it." Shayne noticed that she had stopped trembling.

He filled her in on the evening's activities as succinctly as possible. She listened intently as he outlined his nebulous theories about both Owen Patterson and Rubio Gorro.

"We have to find out what Paco Cruz was up to," he concluded. "That's the key to all of it. It could have been any kind of crime he was planning, and it could involve any of the people I've talked to. It *might* not involve any of them. Hell, Cruz might not have been planning anything! It could have been just talk."

"If anyone does have something to hide, though, you've set yourself up as a danger to them. You're using yourself as bait again, Michael."

Shayne frowned. Lucy was one of the very few people whose disapproval bother him. He said, "I have to grab whatever handle I can get on this case. Otherwise, Emiliano Reyes is going to go to prison for a long, long time, maybe forever. I don't want to see that happen if he's innocent."

"You're still not sure?"

"All I'm sure of is that I'm starving." He got up stiffly. "Come on, Angel. I promised you dinner."

"No, sir." She stood up and put

on her determined face. "You're not going out in that banged-up condition. I've got steaks in the refrigerator and salad makings and a bottle of wine we can chill. You just sit down. You need a good meal and nothing to worry about for a little while."

Shayne stretched, then sat back down on the sofa, putting his feet up on an ottoman. "I'm not going to argue with that prescription, Angel," he grinned.

VII

SHAYNE'S ARM AND LEG were even stiffer when he got up the next morning, but several minutes of stretching and exercise loosened them up. He made scrambled eggs and toast and ate them eagerly, topping them off with strong black coffee that had only a dollop of Martell in it.

Feeling much better, he strolled into his office a little later. Lucy was there first, as usual. Shayne tossed his hat onto the rack and asked. "Any calls this morning, Angel?"

"Nothing that can't wait, I think." She showed him the list of messages, and he grunted in agreement with her assessment of them.

"No one else tried to kill you last night?" she asked.

He grinned. "Only you, Angel. With kindness."

He went into the inner office and dropped into his chair. Pulling

the phone over to him, he dialed a familiar number.

The receiver on the other end was picked up on the first ring. A none-too-chipper voice said, "*Daily News*, Rourke speaking."

Shayne chuckled. "You sound like you had kind of a rough night, Tim."

Timothy Rourke groaned. "Ah, Mike, you should have seen her. Long blonde hair and the face of a madonna ... We had dinner and then went back to my place and sang a few hymns ..."

"I think I've heard this story before," Shayne cut in. "Before you get all wrapped up in it, there's a few other things I'd like to discuss with you."

"Such as people with shotguns? I heard about that, Mike. Don't you get tired of people gunning for you?"

"Sick to death of it, to tell you the truth. But they seem to keep doing it. Listen, Tim, I'll tell you all about it some other time, and you can tell me about the blonde. Right now I need some more information on Owen Patterson."

"I gave Lucy all I had yesterday."

Shayne fired up a cigarette and blew smoke at the ceiling. "Can you dig up some more?" he asked. "I'm especially interested in anything shady in his background."

"Well ..." Rourke hesitated. "I'll see what I can come up with, Mike, but I can't promise anything."

"One other thing, Tim. Do you have any contacts in the Puerto Rican population here?"

Rourke laughed shortly. "I'm the best reporter in town, aren't I? You want contacts, I can get 'em."

"What I want is any dope you can get on a young Puerto Rican named Rubio Gorro. He's in his early twenties, hangs at a bar called the Golden Parrot, and seems to have some pull in the Puerto Rican community. At least he claims to. Think you can come up with anything on him?"

"I can try," Rourke promised.

"Good enough. Meet you for lunch later?"

They agreed to meet at the Beef House at twelve-thirty and then said their goodbyes.

Shayne leaned back in his chair and thought. The mist of the day before had departed, and this day had dawned bright and clear in Miami.

The door between the offices was open, as it often was when Shayne and Lucy were alone there, and he called through it, "Come in here a second, will you, Angel?"

When she appeared in the doorway, he asked, "You don't happen to know where Owen Patterson keeps his yacht, do you?"

"No, but I'm sure that Mrs. Reyes would, since Emiliano worked on it. Do you want me to call her and find out?"

"Please," he nodded, and she went back to her desk.

He heard the dialing of the

phone and then the soft murmur of her voice, and after a moment, Lucy reappeared at the door. "It's berthed at the Albacore Yacht Club," she said. "Slip 56."

Shayne said. "Thanks, Angel," and stood up. "I think I'll take a run out there and see if the *Francesca* is in port." Mentioning *Francesca* made him remember the play that the yacht's namesake had made for him the night before. That was one thing he had edited out of his account to Lucy.

"If it is, I want to talk to the crew members," he continued. "They might be able to tell me something new about Emiliano and Paco."

The Albacore Yacht Club was on Biscayne Bay, not too far from where Owen Patterson lived. There was a gatehouse and a guard at the entrance. A uniformed guard came out as Shayne rolled up to the gate in the Buick. Shayne lowered his window and asked, "Where's the manager's office? This is police business."

Which was true. The murder of Paco Cruz was certainly police business, as well as Shayne's.

"Right over there, sir," the guard replied, pointing out a white building with a red tile roof done in a Mediterranean style. "Let me give you a pass."

Shayne stuck the cardboard pass on the dashboard and drove on, reflecting that security was rather lax here. Still, he wasn't going to complain about the ease

with which he had gotten into the exclusive club.

He passed the manager's office and drove directly to the marina area, where dozens of pleasure craft were tied up. There were quite a few empty slips, too, he noted. The rich were out playing on this warm, sunny morning.

Slip 56 was occupied, though. Shayne parked the Buick and got out to take a good look at the *Francesca*.

It was a fine-looking yacht, with an excellent paint job and what appeared to be plenty of room. A slightly swaying gangway led up onto the deck.

There didn't seem to be anyone around. Perhaps someone was below decks, but no one was moving topside. Shayne put a foot on the gangway and called, "Hello?"

No answer was forthcoming. Shayne strode quickly up the gangway, stepping lightly onto the highly-polished wooden deck. The aluminum trim gleamed in the sun. This yacht was certainly shipshape, which Shayne liked. He was a fairly avid sailor himself, and he appreciated a well-taken-care-of vessel.

He moved closer to the cabin, calling out again. Still no answer. The boat appeared to be deserted.

A sudden sound behind Shayne made him wheel around. The noise had been a hatch opening at the rear of the yacht, and as Shayne watched, a head and a

broad pair of shoulders appeared. The head was nearly bald and the shoulders were clothed in a tight tee shirt. Shayne could see ridges of muscle rippling in those shoulders.

"Who the hell are you?" the man asked, in a voice like the rumble of a powerful engine.

Shayne answered with a question of his own. "You work on this boat?"

The man climbed out of the hatch and stood on the deck beside it, giving Shayne a curious, slightly belligerent stare. He looked like he should have been an assassin or a defensive tackle, not a crewman on a yacht. He cracked the knuckles on his huge right hand and said, "I asked you a question first."

"My name is Mike Shayne. Satisfied?"

"Nope. Now that I know who the hell you are, what the hell are you doing here?"

"Looking for somebody who knew Emiliano Reyes or Páco Cruz. Those names mean anything to you?"

The man shook his head again. "Nope. Never heard of them."

"Where's the rest of the crew?"

"I'm it right now."

"What happened to the others?"

"How should I know? I just started. The boss says watch the boat, don't let nobody mess around it. What do I care what happened before that?"

The man's eyes were small and intent as they regarded Shayne. Shayne had seen eyes like that before, and they usually boded ill for the people at which they stared. He said, "Is your boss around?"

"Nope. I told you, I'm it. Nobody on here but me. I like it that way."

The man's voice was slow and measured. Shayne had the feeling that he was dealing with a man who could take definite pleasure in hurting people. Why Owen Patterson would hire a man like this as a caretaker for his boat was something to ponder.

"You don't know where I can find any of the crew?" Shayne persisted.

"I don't know anything except that I want you to go the hell away and leave me alone. I got work to do on this hull."

There seemed to be something under the surface that this man was keeping under tight control. Shayne couldn't help but wonder what it was. He decided to try to find out.

"Don't let me bother you," he said airily. "I'll just look around a little bit for myself."

He turned away, back toward the cabin. He heard a heavy footstep behind him, and then the man said, "I told you to get off the boat."

Shayne didn't slow down as he walked toward the cabin. Over his shoulder, he tossed, "I don't give

a damn what you told me, friend."

The big man made enough noise as he charged to give Shayne plenty of warning. The redhead waited until the last second, then whirled to one side, bringing the hammer of his right fist around in a blur of speed.

Shayne's move let him avoid the main force of the bald man's lunge, but an outflung arm thudded into Shayne's stomach and grabbed hold as Shayne's fist cracked into the man's temple. Both of them grunted.

The man's momentum was enough to knock Shayne backwards. Before he knew it, they had both gone crashing to the desk. Shayne landed on the bottom and knew he was in trouble.

He rammed his left fist into the man's belly and then brought the heel of his other hand up into the jutting chin. The man's arms had encircled him and were beginning to squeeze. Shayne desperately drove a punch into his kidneys.

Another blow to the chin hard on the heels of the kidney punch knocked the man halfway off Shayne. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Shayne scooted out of his grasp and rolled away on the smooth deck, coming up into a crouch. He had regained his feet first, and he backed off to catch his breath as the other man climbed to his feet.

Shayne asked, "What's the matter? Something in that cabin you don't want me to see?"

"I've got my orders, mister," the bald man said. "That's all that matters."

He plunged forward again, arms swinging in wicked, looping punches that Shayne was hard put to parry. The big detective managed to block them, though, and sent his own shots whistling to the body. Enough of them connected to force the other man back.

Still, Shayne knew that his opponent had more weight and a longer reach, and it was only a matter of time until one of those piledriver punches connected. When it did, that would be the finish of this fight, and Mike Shayne would be the loser.

The bald man abandoned the punches for the moment and tried for a bear hug again. Shayne leaped to one side to avoid his charge, and during the split second the man had his back to him, Shayne took control of the battle.

Shayne planted his big foot in the middle of the man's backside as hard as he could. That extra impetus, along with the man's own momentum, was enough to send him staggering wildly out of control. His knees banged into the railing at the side of the yacht and he started to tip over it. A flailing grab for the railing missed, and a second later water was flying into the air from a gigantic splash.

Shayne went to the rail, taking

his gun from its holster, and looked down. The bald man was shaking water out of his face and holding onto a piling.

"How about a truce?" Shayne asked. He saw a car coming toward them.

"No truce," the man said flatly, as he started to climb out of the water. The sight of Shayne's gun wasn't fazing him.

The approaching car, a big Ford, drove up behind Shayne's Buick and stopped. Corky Patterson got out hurriedly, looking worried. He called out, "What's going on here?"

Shayne nodded shortly to him. "Hello, Patterson. Sorry if I'm out of line, but I just wanted to talk to some of the yacht's crew."

"I told him to get off the boat, Mr. Patterson," the bald man said. "I'll get rid of him in just a minute."

"No, no, Hugo, it's all right. This is Mike Shayne, the private detective. I'm sure he didn't mean any harm. Are you still looking into that murder, Mr. Shayne?"

"That's right," Shayne grunted. "I thought that the other members of the crew might be able to tell me something about Emiliano Reyes and Paco Cruz. What's happened to the crew?"

Patterson came agilely up the gangway. "We had to let them all go, I'm afraid. We're going to put the *Francesca* in dry dock for some work, so we didn't need a crew."

Shayne glanced around at the spanking clean deck and said, "She doesn't look like she needs any work."

"That's because you can't see the keel or the engines."

"Your muscleman there didn't want me to go into the cabin. Just why was that?"

Corky looked embarrassed by the whole situation. He said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne, but Hugo here takes his orders rather seriously. He was told to keep people off the boat but we meant prowlers, vandals, people like that."

"Okay," Shayne growled. "Misunderstandings happen. I guess you don't mind, then, if I have a look in the cabin?"

"Not at all. I'll come with you. We keep a pretty good liquor supply on board if you'd like a drink."

"No, thanks."

Shayne went down the short ladder into the spacious cabin, Corky Patterson at his heels. The place was sumptuously appointed, but there was no one else there. Shayne took a quick look around as Corky stood by, then went back up on deck.

"Have you found out anything that will help you clear the Reyes boy?" Corky asked when they were back in the sunlight.

"I've got several things going," Shayne answered cryptically.

"You know, my — ah — step-

mother was quite impressed with you."

Shayne looked at him sharply. Corky's statement had little inflection, and try as he might, the redhead could not read the other man's expression. He said non-committally, "She seemed like a nice lady."

"Oh, she is. Dad was lucky to get a woman like Francesca."

"Have you heard from your father? Do you know when I might be able to talk to him?"

"Sorry, not yet. Dad is like that, going off without telling anyone how to get hold of him. He's got business interests all over, and he likes to check on them every so often, sort of like a surprise inspection in the army."

Or maybe he's just hiding out until the Cruz murder is filed and forgotten, Shayne thought.

The big detective said, "Thanks for letting me look around. Be seeing you." He walked deliberately past a glowering Hugo, down the gangway, and back to his Buick. Hugo was still standing on deck as he drove off, Shayne observed in the car's mirror, but Corky Patterson had disappeared below decks.

It was a little early for his lunch date with Tim Rourke, but Shayne headed for the Beef House anyway, on the chance that the bony reporter might already be there. It was a good move, for when Shayne walked into the familiar pub a little later, Rourke was

seated in his usual booth, a drink before him.

He lifted the glass in salute as Shayne slid into the booth across from him and said, "How goes it, Tim?"

"Just fine, Staying busy, mostly. Which reminds me, this blonde I was telling you about —"

"Later, later," Shayne cut him off with a grin. "Right now, tell me if you found out anything more about Owen Patterson."

"I got a little more background for you, but there's nothing shady about it, Mike. He started out small in the pipe supply business, worked hard and got a few lucky breaks, and now Patterson Pipe is a multimillion-dollar corporation. He sells to whoever wants his products, but most of his customers are the small oil companies and independent oil distributors. A lot of his pipe even goes to the Middle East and South America."

"How about personally?"

"He and his wife socialize some, but not much. She's more into that scene than he is. He's just a loner at heart, I guess."

The bartender had seen Shayne come in, and now a waiter arrived at the table, carrying the redhead's usual. Shayne took a sip of it gratefully, then asked, "Would there be any thing unusual about Patterson being gone on mysterious business trips, out of touch with home and office, for several days or weeks?"

Rourke shook his head. "Not at

all. The financial editor at the paper says that Patterson gets hit by the Howard Hughes syndrome at times. Likes to disappear, then pop up where you least expect him, like someplace his employees are goofing off. It helps keep them on their toes, I guess."

"While you were asking about Owen Patterson, did you happen to hear anything about his son, Stephen?"

Rourke made wet circles with the bottom of his glass. He shrugged and said, "He didn't sound like much, Mike. Bounced around several colleges and universities in the early Sixties; trying to find himself, then finally got a degree in Business and went to work for his old man."

"Is he important to the business?"

"I got the impression that most of his work was just something to keep him busy. Word has it that Owen isn't too fond of him, but he can't do much except tolerate him and give him something to do, I guess. He is his son, after all."

"Yeah. How about we get something to eat now?"

"Fine with me."

They ordered steaks, salads, and another drink a piece, then lit cigarettes. The food came shortly, and they dug in. As usual, Shayne marveled at Rourke's capacity to pack it away and still look like he was one short step away from starvation.

When the meal was over and they were both sitting back digesting, Shayne asked, "How about this Rubio Gorro I asked you about?"

"I talked to several people I know in the Puerto Rican community, and they all tell the same story. He used to run the biggest street gang down there when he was a kid, but he's been out of that for a couple of years now. The word is he may have moved up from being a street punk to being an up-and-coming young member of the Mob. He claims he's walking the straight and narrow now, but with his reputation, who believes what he says? Whatever, he's not a man to have for an enemy if you've got any business in that part of town."

"Have you heard any rumors of a big job being planned by some Puerto Ricans?"

Rourke held up his hand to stop him. He shook his head. "Not one more word," he said. "No more answers until I get some. What's this all about? I want a story."

Shayne grinned. "Now, Tim, it's not anything that you could use. Not really worth your time, what with all those blonde madonnas you have to worry about."

Rourke slapped the table. "Dammit, Mike, you know that anything you do is newsworthy in this town. Now give."

Shayne chuckled. "All right, don't have a stroke. Here it is." Quickly, he outlined his involve-

ment in the Reyes case. When he was through, Rourke shook his head and said, "It's really a muddle, isn't it?"

"Yeah. You know, Tim, I'm honestly convinced that Emiliano Reyes is not guilty. I feel like I've got all the threads of the case in my hands, but I can't get them tied together where they'll stay put."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Keep digging. Maybe I can turn up something that will link either Patterson or Gorro conclusively with whatever it was that Cruz was hatching up."

Rourke was finishing his drink. "Good luck."

"I'll need it," Shayne grunted.

"Don't we all."

VIII

SHAYNE WENT BY HIS OFFICE for a few minutes to tell Lucy about the morning's happenings, then hit the streets. He spent the afternoon scouring Miami and Miami Beach for any word that might help him. He talked to underworld contacts, street sources that he had cultivated over the years. He asked about the Puerto Ricans, he asked about Owen Patterson, he asked every question he could think of to ask.

The returns were nil.

A few of Shayne's informants said they had heard a lot of money was coming into Miami from

somewhere, but they didn't know where it was coming from or why. A heavy flow of cash into the city was almost always indicative of something illegal on the offing, but there was nothing to tie it in with the matter at hand. It was all too nebulous to be of any help to Shayne.

When he had exhausted all of his sources, he began going up and down the beachfront area for quite a few blocks on either side of the place where Paco Cruz's body had been found, looking for someone, anyone, who might have seen or heard something on the night of the murder.

Again, that turned up nothing.

Shayne was getting frustrated. Frustrated and mad. After a seemingly endless series of dead ends, he was ready to start beating some answers out of people. The only trouble was, he didn't know who had the answers.

The afternoon had slipped away in legwork. When he saw that the sun had gone down and night was fast falling, Shayne decided to hit one more beachfront bar and then call it a day. He parked his car in the lot of a rundown place called The Owl's Hoot and went inside to ask anybody who would listen if they knew two men named Emiliano Reyes and Paco Cruz or if they had seen anything funny on the beach three nights earlier.

It was the same story. Nobody knew anything. Shayne cursed a mental blue streak and headed

outside to his car, ready to go back to his apartment and get himself a good stiff drink. He was so angry and disgusted that he wasn't paying much attention as he jerked open the door of the Buick. That wasn't like him, since years of detective work had trained him to habitually keep his eyes open.

This time it almost got him killed.

A flicker of light was all that warned him. He jerked back as a dark form surged out of the car at him. Cloth ripped as the knife which a street light had reflected off of tore his coat.

The assailant slammed into Shayne, knocking him backwards. Shayne threw a wild punch with his left hand while grabbing for his gun with the right. Before he could pull it from its holster, someone else grabbed him from behind. His arms were pinned by the grappler.

The man with the knife was moving in again. Shayne kicked out at him and drove him back, but the swinging knife slashed his leg through his pants. He could feel blood running down his shin.

He had to get loose, or sooner or later the blade would find its target. He brought his foot down on his captor's instep as hard as he could.

The man gasped and cursed in Spanish. His grip loosened for a split second, and Shayne used the opening to drive an elbow back into a soft stomach. The arms that had been around him came

completely free as the man staggered backwards.

Shayne didn't have any time to catch his breath. He had to deal with the man with the knife, who was closing in again. Shayne ducked away from his lunge this time, using the motion to launch a roundhouse right of his own.

The blow connected just above the knife wielder's ear, sending him sprawling. Shayne whirled to meet the rush of the second man, who had recovered from the blow to the stomach.

The man may have had a soft belly, but his fists were hard. Shayne stood toe to toe with him, trading punches for a long moment. Then the soft shuffle of feet behind him warned him. He jerked his head away from a punch and threw himself to the left, leaving a big foot there to trip up the man with the knife, who had tried to sneak up on him.

The shadowy figure lost his balance as he hit Shayne's foot, falling forward toward his companion. There was a high, thin scream of pain as they collided.

Shayne had managed to get his gun free. He leveled it at the two figures in the dark. One of them was folding up with a moan, the other was turning back toward Shayne, still clutching the knife that now had his companion's blood on it.

Shayne rapped. "Hold it!" but the figure kept coming. Only a few feet separated them, and there

was not time to be fancy. Shayne pulled the trigger twice as fast as he could, the shots sounding like one.

Both bullets smashed into the torso of the man with the knife, hurling him backwards. The knife clattered on the street, flung from his hand as he fell in a heap.

Ignoring him, Shayne raced over to the man who had been inadvertently stabbed. He was lying curled up on his side, breathing raggedly. Shayne crouched over him and said urgently, "Who sent you after me? Who are you working for?"

The man muttered something. Shayne didn't catch the words, but he could tell that they were Spanish. He said, "Did Gorro send you? Listen to me! *Did Gorro send you?*"

It was no use. He was talking to a dead man.

People were beginning to appear, drawn by the shots. Wearily, Shayne walked over to the sprawled body of the other man. He noted with ironic disgust that his snap shooting had been accurate. Both shots had hit the man's shirt pocket, and he must have been dead before he hit the street.

Shayne holstered his gun and stalked away from the bodies. This really tore things. If he hung around until the cops arrived, Peter Painter would have him hauled in and have a field day with the questioning. If he left the

scene, he would be placing his license in jeopardy.

He was mad, though, good and mad. He had little doubt that these two were the ones who had tried to blast him in the basement garage, and he was more than halfway convinced that Rubio Gorro had sent them. It was time to pay another visit to the Golden Parrot. The details of this killing could be worked out with Painter later.

Hell, the worst they could do was hang him!

He climbed into the Buick and sped away, heading directly for the Golden Parrot.

When he got there, the music was still blaring inside, and the strobe was still flashing. There were more people here tonight, and he got several belligerent looks as he elbowed his way through the crowd to the bar. The same bartender was on duty. Recognition and anger flared in his eyes as he spied Shayne's big redheaded form. He shouted over the music, "What the hell you want?"

"Where's Gorro?" Shayne shouted back.

"I don't know what you're talking about! You better get going before you get hurt, man!"

Shayne knew it was a foolish thing to do, but he couldn't restrain his temper any longer. He reached across the bar and grabbed the man. "I want Gorro!" he shouted in the bartender's face.

"And I want him *now*, dammit!"

The music fell silent abruptly, and a voice cracked through the silence. "You got him, Shayne. You better have a good reason for causing trouble here, or I'll turn these people loose on you."

Shayne released the bartender and turned slowly. The crowd of Puerto Ricans around him looked uniformly hostile. Rubio Gorro was standing over in the corner, by the juke box, a stunningly beautiful girl beside him. He looked intently at Shayne and went on, "I'm asking for an explanation, man."

"I'd like one, too," Shayne grated. "I'd like to know why you sent those two killers after me. Was I getting too close to something?"

Coming right out with it like that was a dangerous thing to do. Gorro could turn these people into a mob in a second, and he could send their full wrath against Shayne. The big detective was glad he had reloaded his gun, replacing the two rounds he had fired.

Gorro merely looked puzzled at Shayne's words, though. He said quietly, "What the hell are you talking about, Shayne? I didn't send anybody after you. When I want somebody, I get him myself."

"A couple of Latin Americans tired to kill me twice since yesterday afternoon when I was here. I still want to know why you sent

them to get me!"

Gorro frowned. "A couple of Latin Americans? There's more than one kind, man. How do you know they were Puerto Ricans?"

Something clicked in Shayne's head, a connection he hadn't made until now. Gorro was right; it was a mistake to automatically assume the would-be killers were Puerto Ricans. But someone else involved in this case had a Latin American connection ...

After a long moment of thought, Shayne looked directly into Gorro's dark eyes and said, "I think maybe I owe you an apology. Is there someplace we can talk privately?"

One of the men standing behind Gorro said, "No, Rubio! It's a trick to get you by yourself."

Gorro shook his head. "I don't think so. Shayne wouldn't do that." He motioned with his head. "Come on. There's a back room here."

They went through a door that cut off the flashing light of the strobe when it shut behind them. There were a table and chairs in the room, and Gorro gestured at them. He said, "Out there, you looked like you had figured something out. Something about Emili-ano and Paco?"

Shayne nodded. "I don't have all the pieces yet, but I've got a picture that's beginning to make sense."

"So sit down and tell me about it."

Ten minutes later, after Shayne had laid out his theory, Gorro was nodding thoughtfully. He said, "It makes sense. But what are you going to do about it?"

"I've got a few ideas. Would you be interested in helping?"

"Why should I?"

Shayne's face was grim as he said, "Because Mrs. Reyes doesn't want her son in jail, and we're the only ones who can stop it."

IX

SHAYNE HEADED BACK to his apartment from the Golden Parrot. He wanted to call Lucy and let her know that he was all right and had a handle on the case at last.

He drove carefully, not wanting to attract any attention to himself. Someone at the scene of the shooting earlier might have gotten a description of him or of the Buick and given it to the cops. If that was the case, Painter would pull out all the stops as soon as he heard about it.

Shayne was glad he was back across the Bay. The Miami police might already be looking for him, but he felt sure he could wrangle a little time out of Chief Will Gentry in which to operate.

When he got to his hotel, he left the Buick on the street, since he intended to be leaving again soon. He didn't suspect *how* soon.

As soon as he stepped into the lobby, a young blonde woman got

up from one of the armchairs and hurried over to him. He recognized her immediately as Melissa Davis, Owen Patterson's secretary.

"Oh, Mr. Shayne, I'm so glad you're here!" she exclaimed before he could say anything. "I called your office earlier, but your secretary didn't know how to get in touch with you. I was hoping you'd show up here."

"Hey, slow down," Shayne said. At their meeting the day before, she hadn't struck him as the type to babble so. Something really had her shook up, and he could make a pretty good guess what it was.

"Just tell me what the problem is," he urged.

Melissa made a visible effort to regain her composure, then said, "Mr. Patterson is back from his trip, and he wants to see you."

"He arrived back unexpectedly?"

"Yes, late this afternoon. When I told him that you had been at the house and wanted to speak to him, he became very excited and said that he wanted to talk to you, too. He told me to bring you to the house as soon as possible. But then you weren't in your office or at your apartment here ..."

"So you got worried about letting your boss down?"

"That's right. Can we get right over to the house? I hate to keep Mr. Patterson waiting."

"By all means, let's not do

that." She didn't seem to notice the touch of sarcasm in his voice. He took her arm and steered her back to the door.

Shayne's mind was racing. As soon as he had heard that Owen Patterson wanted to see him, a voice inside his head had yelled *Trap!* And yet walking into a trap was sometimes the best way of defeating it. Better that than continuing to play sitting duck.

Of course, if he went along with what Melissa Davis wanted, he would have to abandon his earlier plan and leave Rubio Gorr hanging. Still, this might be the simplest and quickest way to work things out.

He put Melissa in the car and then went around to get in behind the wheel. As he moved out into the traffic, he asked her, "Did Mr. Patterson say what he wanted to see me about?"

"No, but I'm sure it must have something to do with that case you're investigating."

He glanced over at her out of the corner of his eye. She was undeniably lovely, and he didn't like the thought of her being mixed up in a dirty deal like this one. His mouth twisted for a fraction of a second in a grimace, and then he put the thought out of his head. He asked, "Do you know if Corky and Francesca are at the house with Mr. Patterson?"

"They were both there when I left." She swallowed. "I don't

know if they still are or not."

She sounded worried. Shayne didn't blame her. To be saying something, he asked, "What do you think of Corky and Francesca, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Oh, I don't know if I should say anything ..."

"It won't go any further."

"Well ... I don't trust Francesca. She's got every man she meets wrapped around her little finger. She's certainly gotten more out of life than she deserves. She doesn't have to work for things like some of us. Men just seem to want to do things for her."

"What about Corky?"

"I — I always liked Corky. I thought he liked me. He used to bring me presents sometimes, when he would come back from business trips overseas. He brought me some very expensive Pre-Columbian art from Venezuela not long ago."

Shayne frowned. "Venezuela? I got the impression that Corky didn't have much to do with running the company."

Melissa looked away, out the window. "He doesn't. He thinks he does, but anyone who can be objective can see that he doesn't. Sometimes, I think that Mr. Patterson sent him on trips just to get him out of the way for a while."

They were both silent for several minutes. Shayne was thinking furiously now and wishing that he had had the opportunity to get in touch with Rubio

Gorro and change the plans they made. It was too late now, though. He couldn't stop and call the Puerto Rican without making Melissa suspicious, and unless she thought he had been taken in by her story, she would probably give him away as soon as they arrived.

All that was left for him to do now was play the hand out. The cards could fall one of two ways, and he would just have to deal with it when the time came.

The evening traffic was not very heavy this night, and they made good time, arriving at Owen Patterson's Bal Harbour residence shortly. The gates were unlocked and wide open — like the jaws of a trap, Shayne reflected — and he drove the Buick straight through and up the drive to the house. It was dark, with no lights showing in any of the windows, and Shayne didn't like it. He slid a hand under his coat unobtrusively and made sure his gun moved easily in its holster.

Bringing the car to a stop at the front door, Shayne said, "Doesn't look to me like anyone is home."

"Mr. Patterson's study is at the rear of the house," Melissa said quickly. "He's probably waiting for us there."

Shayne didn't believe her for a second, but now wasn't the time to start calling her a liar. Instead, he got out of the car and went around to open her door.

She led the way up the door of the mansion, with Shayne fol-

lowing closely behind her. It was unlocked, and they stepped through into the dark foyer. Melissa said, "I'll turn on some lights."

Shayne stood still, listening to the tap of her high heels as she walked away from him. His fingers hovered near the butt of his gun.

There was a change in the sound of Melissa's footsteps. She had gone around a corner somewhere, and still no lights had come on. Shayne felt a prickling on the back of his neck, and he yanked the .38 from its holster. He wasn't going to wait any longer for this trap to close.

He didn't have to. Suddenly, there was light. Bright, harsh light that flashed in his eyes, blinding him with its glare. He said, "Dammit!" and threw up his free hand, trying to shield his dazzled eyes.

A voice came out of the glare, a voice he recognized. "Drop the gun, Shayne."

"The hell I will," Shayne grated. He had been waiting for something to shoot at, and now he had a target. Hurriedly, he jerked the gun up and fired, aiming at the sound of the voice.

Someone yelled, and there was a tinkle of smashing glass. The light winked out. Shayne's bullets had found the small portable searchlight that had been supplying it, but that stroke of luck came too late. He was still blinded, and

would be for several more minutes.

He triggered off several more shots, then turned one hundred and eighty degrees and ran for the door. Miniature suns were dancing in front of his eyes.

He made it only a few feet before something tripped him. He fought to regain his balance, but then something else slapped against the side of his head. Shayne went to one knee, slashing out blindly with his gun hand.

The blow connected, and someone gasped in pain. Then an arm looped around Shayne's throat, jerking his head back and squeezing his wind off. He tried to drive his elbow into the stomach of whoever was holding him, but the angle was too awkward.

There was quite a bit of yelling going on now, most of it in Spanish. The voice that Shayne had recognized was shouting orders in English. Shayne snapped off another wild shot, and then a hard fist hit him in the jaw.

The gun was plucked from his hand. Someone hit him in the stomach, three times, and he felt himself slipping down toward unconsciousness. His lungs were screaming for air, and pain rippled through his belly. Still, he would have kept fighting, rather than let himself slide down that long black tunnel willingly.

The decision was taken out of his hands. Something cracked against the back of his head, and

he didn't even know it when he hit the floor.

X

THE FIRST THING he was aware of when he came to was a rocking motion. He recognized it immediately. He was at sea.

He kept his eyes closed and tried to keep his breathing even. No point in letting his captors know that he was back in the land of the living. He wanted to know more about what was going on before he made any kind of move.

His hands and feet were tied, there was no doubt about that. There was smooth wood underneath him, and it made for an uncomfortable bed. He guessed that he was in the cabin of the *Francesca*. That was the only thing that made sense.

So far, Shayne's keen ears hadn't picked up a thing except the soft rumbling of the boat's engines as it cleaved through the water. He wondered if he was alone in the cabin.

He was lying on his back, so he carefully slit one eye as thinly as he could. The cabin was dimly lit, but there was enough illumination for him to see the man who was sitting on a small sofa across the room.

The man was middle-aged and looked to be powerfully built. His skin was lined and leathery, and his hair and beard were grey. As far as Shayne could tell, he wasn't tied.

Shayne used the rocking of the boat to conceal the motion of his head as he rolled it slightly to one side. Now he could see the rest of the cabin. It was empty. Now looked like the best chance he would get to talk to his companion.

Shayne opened his eyes all the way and turned his head back toward the man. In a low voice, he said, "Mr. Patterson?"

The man's head jerked around. He started to get up, then sank back down on the sofa with a defeated air. He said, "I'm glad to see you're still alive, Shayne. I wish I could promise you'd stay that way."

Shayne sat up, no easy task considering he was bound hand and foot and had a splitting headache besides. He said, "You are Owen Patterson, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," the man answered. "I'm Owen Patterson, the fool."

"Save the self-pity for later," Shayne growled. "Come over here and get me loose."

Patterson shook his head sadly, "I can't do it. Shayne. Lord knows, I'd like to, but then Corky would kill me."

"He will anyway," Shayne said savagely.

"I don't think so. The boy hates me, but he told me that if I didn't give him any trouble, he wouldn't kill me. I may not have that many years left, but I'd still rather live them as a prisoner than give them up."

Shayne grimaced, pulling at his

bonds. Whoever had tied him up had know what he was doing.

As if Patterson had read his thoughts, he said, "It was that bald-headed one, that Hugo, who tied you up. I don't think you'll get loose, Shayne. Besides, if you cause any trouble, they're likely to kill Melissa."

"She's not one of them, then?"

"Lord, no! She's in their power, though, just as surely as I've been these past few weeks. She had to do whatever Corky and Francesca told her to do. Corky threatened to kill me if she didn't cooperate, just like he told me he'd kill her if I gave him any trouble."

Shayne's grey eyes were darting around the room, looking for something he could use to cut himself loose. There was nothing. Unless Owen Patterson set him free, they were all doomed.

"You can't let Corky get away with it," he said. "He killed Paco Cruz, didn't he? You can't let him get away with murder!"

"Yes, he killed the Cruz boy," Patterson said wearily. "Paco found out about what Corky was doing and wanted some money to keep quiet. Corky could have given it to him, it wouldn't have been that much in the long run, but he couldn't stand to be crossed. It happened while I was there; that was the first I had heard about what Corky was doing. It was like ... like he was a different person from the son I had raised. He went wild. He killed

that boy, and he dumped the body on the beach. I can still hardly believe it."

Patterson's voice had gotten lower and lower, as if he were talking to himself. Shayne pulled his knees up and began to try to get his hands in front of him. The trick almost required the limberness of a contortionist, which the big redheaded detective definitely was not.

He roused Patterson out of his reverie by asking, "What is it that Corky is smuggling along with your pipe? Is he bringing something out of South America or sending something in?"

Patterson heaved a sigh. "Guns. He's supplying guns. He started out selling them to the rebels, but tonight he's making a special delivery with this boat. He's selling a load of guns to the government in power now. Playing both sides against themselves." Patterson laughed shortly, bitterly. "I never thought he was much good for anything, that he didn't have a head for business. Guess I was wrong, huh, Shayne?"

Shayne made one more try at convincing Patterson. "You can't let him do it, even if he is your son. He's a murderer, a gun runner, and he even stole your own wife away from you. Get me loose, and we'll stop him together."

"I doubt that, Mr. Shayne."

Corky had appeared at the top of the short ladder that led down into the cabin. He gave them a mock-

ing smile and continued, "I think I've done rather well, and nobody is going to stop me now, not even you. I'll admit you gave me a scare earlier, coming out to the boat like you did. Luckily, Hugo got my father hidden before he confronted you." Corky sauntered across the cabin toward Shayne and said softly, "No, you won't stop me. I've got Francesca, and the corporation is in our hands now, and it's going to be more lucrative than ever since we'll be dealing in more than just pipe."

Shayne felt anger boiling around inside him. Furiously, he said, "You bastard! What kind of man are you? You'd let an innocent man go to jail for something you did, wouldn't you?"

Corky laughed. "Of course I would. When I killed Paco, I didn't expect the police to find a ready-made scapegoat, but once they did, I wasn't going to let you mess things up. Once Reyes is in jail, I'll be completely in the clear." His smile became wolfish. "I've already made arrangements to have him taken care of while he's inside. Cruz admitted before I finished killing him that Reyes knew nothing of my plans, but I don't believe in taking chances. And everyone else who knows will be dead, too."

Shayne scowled. He was dealing with a borderline psychotic, he realized. Dominated all his life by Owen Patterson, in love with his stepmother, Corky would stop at

nothing now. He had demonstrated that quite plainly.

"We'll be rendezvousing with the ship sent by my South American friends shortly," Corky went on. "You're going to help us transfer the guns, Shayne. I think that's fitting, don't you?" He pulled a clasp knife from his pocket and tossed it to his father. "Cut his legs loose, Dad."

Owen Patterson obeyed. He cut the ropes on Shayne's ankles, then handed the knife back to Corky. Shayne got to his feet with Patterson's help, pins and needles shooting through his deadened legs.

"Come on, Shayne. I want you up on deck with the rest of us."

The ladder was a little difficult to navigate without his hands, but Shayne made it up, followed by Owen Patterson. As Corky led them out onto the deck, he gestured at a large pile of wooden crates. "Automatic rifles, ammunition, even a few crates of grenades. Plenty of firepower there to wipe out a bunch of revolutionaries."

"That you also supplied with guns," Shayne gritted.

Corky just grinned in the moonlight.

Shayne could see the other people on the deck now. Melissa Davis was sitting on a bench, huddled and frightened and sick.

Francesca Patterson stood at the railing, the wind whipping her

dark hair. She looked positively exhilarated.

Two men were standing beside the crates of weapons. Corky said, "Let me introduce you to *Senors* Marcos and Tovar, Mr. Shayne. They represent my latest customers. It was two of their associates, acting under my suggestions, that contacted you earlier."

"You mean that tried to kill me," Shayne growled. He turned to the South Americans. "Don't you people know that Patterson also sold guns to the rebels in your country?"

One of them nodded. "Of course we know, *Senor* Shayne. But our army is poorly equipped. We need guns, too, and *Senor* Patterson will sell them to us for less than anyone else."

"Just like any other business," Corky chuckled. "I deal in high volume and low prices."

Shayne felt revulsion gnawing at his insides. His fists ached to smash into that grinning face.

Another voice came from the bridge. "I see their lights, boss."

Shayne turned his head. Hugo was at the wheel, and Shayne also saw the lights he had spotted. They were coming up rapidly on the South American vessel that would receive the load of guns.

Corky took a pistol from his pocket. He said, "All right, Shayne, I'm going to cut you loose now, and you're going to help us with those crates. Don't try anything." He darted a glance toward

Francesca. "I could have killed you earlier, you know. I just wanted to show everyone that you're not such a big man after all."

He moved behind Shayne, and a second later, Shayne felt the knife saw through the rope on his wrists. Corky stepped away from him hurriedly, keeping the pistol trained on him.

Shayne flexed his arms, rubbing the raw places on his wrists. His muscles cried out from being cramped, but he couldn't worry about a little pain now. Unless he was able to make a grandstand play of some kind, he and Melissa and probably Owen Patterson would be shark bait as soon as the weapons transfer was completed.

Only a few hundred yards separated the boats now. Their meeting was minutes away. Shayne gauged the distance between himself and Corky. If he could make that leap and get the gun away from him ...

"Hey, boss!" Hugo's voice rang out with more emotion than Shayne had heard in it before. "There's another boat!"

Everyone turned to look. The third boat was coming up rapidly, its engines open all the way. Shayne had seen no sign of it earlier. It must have just caught up to them.

As they watched its approach, Corky exclaimed, "Damn! Who is that? What are they doing here?"

The answer came a second later.

A voice came floating over the water, faint with distance even though it was magnified by a bull-horn.

"This is the Coast Guard! Heave to!"

"Oh, my God," Corky gasped.

This was Shayne's one chance, and he knew it. No one was paying any attention to him. He launched himself into a dive.

He smashed into Corky, tearing the gun from his fingers. The South Americans yelled, and he shoved Corky away and spun to face them.

They had snatched guns from under their coats, and the weapons cracked almost simultaneously. Shayne heard slugs whistling around his head. He hated to fire, around the crates of munitions, but there wasn't much choice. He aimed calmly and squeezed off three shots. The second one missed. The other two found their targets.

Both men were thrown back by the bullets, losing their guns. Shayne knew that even if they weren't dead, they would be out of the fight for a while. He was turning around when someone grabbed him.

"You bastard!" Corky wailed, bouncing ineffectual punches off Shayne's shoulders. "You'll ruin it all!"

His mouth set in a tight line, Shayne stopped himself from blasting Corky at close range. Instead, he brought his left up in a

whistling uppercut that crunched into the smuggler's jaw. Corky flew backwards, bounced off the crates of weapons, and fell limply to the deck.

Shayne glanced around. Owen Patterson was standing by the railing, looking dazed by the violence. Melissa Davis was gazing at Shayne with the beginnings of hope in her eyes. And Francesca was looking down at Corky's sprawled body, smiling sourly. She said, "He really had me believing he could pull it off. I guess I overestimated him ..."

"I guess so," Shayne agreed.

He wheeled to face the last threat now. Hugo had left the wheel and was stalking slowly toward him. The redhead brought the gun around to cover him.

"Well, this deal's all shot to hell, ain't it?" Hugo said softly.

"I'd say so," Shayne replied. "You might as well give it up."

"Hell, I'm not going to fight you, Shayne. Not now. Nobody's going to pay me for it now." He pointed at the Coast Guard vessel, whose lights were much closer now. I'm not going to let them take me, either. I don't like jails. Take it easy, Shayne."

Almost before Shayne knew what was happening, Hugo leaped over the railing and cut into the water in a clean dive. Shayne yelled, "Hey!" and rushed to the rail. He lined the sights of the gun up on Hugo's back, as the bald man launched into a powerful

stroke, swimming away from the yacht.

The slowly, he lowered the gun. Turning to Francesca, he asked, "How far off shore are we?"

"About five miles."

"If he thinks he can make it that far through the sharks, I guess he deserves a chance to try."

Melissa suddenly cried, "Mr. Shayne! That boat!"

Shayne whirled. The South American boat was barely fifty feet away now, and he could hear excited voices shouting on it. They had no idea what was going on and would be confused by the gunfire. He ran for the wheel. There was danger of collision here.

He began to spin the wheel, swerving the yacht away from the South Americans. It looked like they were going to avoid collision, but then he heard Melissa scream again. He looked over his shoulder and saw Corky coming toward him, face twisted in hate and insanity, a gun in his hand.

Shayne dove for the deck as Corky opened up. The bullets went wild, screaming off into the night, right at the South American boat. Shayne roared, "No!" If those people were fired on, they might think that they had been double-crossed, set up for a trap. And they might return the fire ... right at the yacht loaded with ammunition and grenades ...

Shayne triggered off a carefully aimed shot. Corky grabbed at his belly, took two steps backwards,

and sat down suddenly, whimpering.

The damage was done, though. Shayne heard the crackle of gunfire over the water, as the South Americans opened up with a machine gun. He heard Francesca Patterson scream, and then he was on his feet, sprinting across the deck wrapping his left arm around Melissa and grabbing Owen Patterson with his right. The railing loomed up before him.

There was nothing graceful about this dive. It was a tumbling fall, and the breath was knocked out of Shayne when he hit the water. Somehow, he kept his grasp on Melissa and Patterson. He began to kick as hard as he could, trying to get them as far away from the boat as possible before a slug burned its way into the crates ...

The *Francesca* turned into a ball of noise and flame.

A bulled had found the mark.

The concussion of the shock wave knocked Shayne out for a few seconds. When he came to, he found he was floating on top of the water as debris from the yacht pattered down from the sky around him. He saw Melissa and Patterson floating a few feet away.

A shape loomed up out of the darkness. Lines came down from the boat, and helping hands were extended. Shayne helped the semiconscious Melissa and Patterson aboard, then let himself be hauled up. He stood dripping on

the deck, bone-tired, and said to Rubio Gorro, "You're a damn good actor. For a minute, I thought you really *were* the Coast Guard."

Rubio grinned, his teeth shining in the moonlight. "We try to please. You okay?"

"Yeah. You'd better take Patterson and Melissa here below. Patterson can clear Emiliano Reyes. He was there when his son killed Paco Cruz."

"Your smuggling theory was right, huh?"

Shayne nodded. "Corky Patterson was running guns. I thought when we talked earlier that his father was behind it, but it was all Corky. Corky and Francesca."

Both of whom had still been on the yacht when it exploded. Shayne's lips drew back in disgust. A hell of a way for Corky to prove that he was as much a man as his father — murder and gun-running.

A thought occurred to him. "What happened to the other boat? The South Americans?"

"Turned tail and ran when the big fireworks went off. I had one of my boys call the real Coast Guard and alert them. Maybe they'll catch them."

One of Rubio's friends handed Shayne a blanket and led Melissa and Patterson below decks. Shayne wrapped the welcome warmth around him and asked, "How come you happened to show

up when you did?"

"I got worried when you didn't come back for the raid on the yacht like we had planned. So the boys and I went over to the marina anyway and snuck in. We saw this Corky and the others arrive with what looked like a big sack of potatoes. Turned out to be you. We thought we'd better tag along and see what was happening. Sorry it took us so long to catch up to you."

Someone had produced a bottle.

Shayne took it and tilted it to his lips gratefully. After a long swallow, he said with a grin, "You made it in time. Barely. What held you up?"

"It took us a while to find a boat. Most of them at that marina had people on board."

Shayne looked at him. "You mean you stole this boat?"

"Hell, man, what do you think?"

Shayne thought he was glad that he was heading home. ●

**COMING
IN OUR NEXT ISSUE**

PAYOFF IN BLOOD
The New Mike Shayne Short Novel
by Brett Halliday

DEATH AND THE DANCING SHADOWS
by James Reasoner

VULCAN'S WIDOW
by Edward D. Hoch

DON'T MISS IT!

Mike's Mail



LESS SHAYNE?

I've been a fan of MSMM since the time when Leo Margulies revived the fiftieth anniversary of WEIRD TALES in its original format. After four issues, the magazine collapsed because of poor distribution and circulation. I stopped buying MSMM in '74. Recently, I began buying again and found that the magazine is undergoing changes. I'm not crazy about reading Mike Shayne's story month after month. I'd like reading other selections from your magazine. I also enjoyed reading features in *Stiff Competition* and *Mystery Makers*. It is something for me to relax with between stories.

I have a suggestion if you're willing to listen. Have Mike Shayne's story on a bimonthly basis and the other half put in Mike's Guest of the Month, rotating back and forth every month of the year. And then put out WEIRD TALES in a digest-size format with 128 pages published quarterly. Use your former editors who once edited MSMM, such as Frank Belknap Long or Sam Merwin, Jr., or hire the master of horror, Robert Bloch. For the first issue you need a front

cover artist named Lee Brown Coye, famous for his "Weirdism" drawn in the days of the pulps. Get Stephen Fabian to do interior illustrations.

Gary Seiler
Ontario, Canada

I'm glad people are noticing that MSMM is going through changes; hopefully, the changes are for the better, and so far readers have liked what we're doing. As for a Shayne every other month, well, what would MSMM be without that big loveable redheaded Miami detective gracing its pages? Actually, Gary, most readers seem to like the short novels. Besides, who would we get as the every-other-month replacement? Re: WEIRD TALES, you'll be interested to know that the magazine is being revived again, but not by us. Well-known fantasy writer Lin Carter is the editor. Meanwhile, there's a magazine called WHISPERS which is in the WT tradition, using horror stories by Robert Bloch and others, with illustrations by Fabian and Coye, in a really attractive package. Bloch, by the way has promised to keep MSMM in mind for future stories.

The Two-Star Corpse

by W. L. FIELDHOUSE

A blur cut through the air, and the General fell to the ground, a thick arrow imbedded in his chest. Major Clifford Lansing of the army's Criminal Investigation Department had to find the killer, not only because it was his job, but because the fate of NATO depended upon it!

COLONEL BARNES didn't enjoy being the post commander of Danton Barracks. Even by USAEUR standards Danton was small. It was just one of several tiny bases scattered all over Southern Germany. Then, as if to reward Barnes for his long months of suffering, headquarters decided to choose Danton Barracks as the site of a special conference involving some of the top brass in

Europe.

Of course, the Colonel was delighted. If he could impress his visitors, he might finally trade in his silver eagle for a star. Barnes began preparing for the conference two months in advance. The personnel stationed at Danton Barracks felt as if they were getting ready for the Inspector General. Every billet was spotless, every vehicle in the motor pool

was in top condition, every soldier's field gear and wall locker was ready for inspection, every section's records and equipment were in order.

A color guard with bright silver helmets, flag bearers, and two squads of troops with M-16 rifles shivered in the bitter February cold to greet the motorcade of USAEUR big wigs as they entered Danton Barracks. What a collection of brass emerged from those green Army limousines: one lieutenant general, five major generals and a dozen brigadiers! Barnes ignored the near-zero cold as he stood at the threshold of the headquarters building, gazing at his guests' silver stars with envy.

Reporters from both *The Stars and Stripes* and *The Overseas Weekly* were present as well. They seemed vaguely interested in the meeting and the men attending it, but one individual aroused more activity from the military newsmen than all the others put together: Major General Burton Myers.

Finding Myers in the crowd was easy. The reporters clustered around him like autograph hounds. The two-star general was a tall, broadshouldered man with piercing blue eyes and a long lantern jaw. Most of all, he was noted for feeling strongly about many matters and supporting his notions in a very outspoken manner.

"General Myers, is this meeting about the President's proposal to withdraw American Troops from West Germany?" a newsman asked, clutching his notepad as he jogged along beside Myers.

"No comment," the General replied, turning up his collar to combat the icy, snow-laced wind.

"You've been a very vocal critic of the Administration establishing normalized relations with Mainland China and the new Salt Treaty," another reporter remarked. "Why hasn't the President dealt with you as he did with General Singlaub a couple of years ago?"

"Maybe he's too busy," Myers mused with a half-smile. "This is an election year, you know."

"Has your position concerning an increase of USAEUR forces and a return to the draft changed in any way, General?" a female reporter inquired through chattering teeth.

"No, it has not," Myers stated firmly. "I'll consider reducing our troops in Europe when the Other Side tears down the Berlin Wall."

With that, General Myers left the newsmen and galloped up the well-salted stairs of the headquarters building. Colonel Barnes snapped to attention and saluted smartly. Myers raised his right arm to return the gesture.

Suddenly, something cut through the air. The blur of an object whistled sharply before it struck with a dull *thud*, burying

one third its length in the general's chest. Myers froze for a moment, staring down at the foot-long wooden shaft protruding from his blood-stained uniform. He touched the feathered end gently as if unable to believe it was real. Then he fell backward, toppling down the stairs.

THE WHITE VOLKSWAGEN pulled up to the headquarters building. Major Clifford Lansing climbed from the diminutive car and gratefully stretched his long, lean body. An MP jeep had already arrived, and two military cops stood over the body of General Myers. Lansing wished he were wearing his Airborne boots instead of low-quarters as he nearly slipped on the icy sidewalk while walking to the MP's.

"Good afternoon, sir," one of the cops said as he saluted.

"Good and cold," Lansing replied, returning the salute, "I'm from the Criminal Investigation Department. What have you got so far?"

"General Myers was killed by an arrow fired from a window up there," the MP answered as he pointed a gloved finger at a clock tower extending from an archway about one hundred yards from the headquarters building.

"Colonel Barnes, the post commander, tried to get a look at the assassin, but when he ran down the steps, the killer fired another arrow at him. It missed,

but it sure scared the hell out of the Colonel," the other MP said. "Needless to say, nobody was too eager to go up there after that. Half the men on post were standing out here at parade rest freezing their butts off. Most of them had M-16's, but not one man had a single round of ammunition. You know how these ceremonial things are, sir. Anyway, by the time somebody finally got the unit armory open and issued some ammo, the killer had plenty of time to escape."

"Has anybody been up there yet?" Lansing inquired as he knelt to examine the body.

"We checked it out as soon as we arrived," one of the cops said. "It's a real maze up there, and it's so dark we had to use our flashlights every step of the way."

"Find anything?" the major asked, rising.

"Yes, sir. A bow and a couple of extra arrows. All the stuff seems to be hand-made. It's in the back of the jeep if you want to take a look."

Lansing moved to the vehicle. The bow appeared to be constructed from a roughly-carved tree branch and a length of cord. The arrows, like the one stuck in the general's chest, were crude but effective.

"We were careful not to ruin any fingerprints that might be on any of these things," one of the cops remarked.

"In this sort of weather I

suspect the killer would wear gloves even if he didn't consider leaving fingerprints," Lansing said. "But we'll dust for them anyway. The C.I.D. lab team should be here soon. Keep the rubbernecks away until they arrive."

Resisting a pang of guilt as he left the MP's at the mercy of the howling snowstorm, Lansing mounted the stairs and entered the headquarters building. He was immediately accosted by Col. Barnes.

"Are you the homicide investigator General Clayton told us about?" Barnes asked.

Lansing nodded as he unbuttoned his Army-issue overcoat. "Where is the General, sir?"

"In the conference room. He was one of the men who came here for a special meeting," Barnes frowned. "After what happened to General Myers I imagine they'll cancel it."

"Where is the conference room, Colonel?"

"You know, the maniac that killed the General shot an arrow at me too? I barely managed to dodge in time."

Before Lansing could repeat his question, a familiar voice called to him from the hallway. "Cliff!"

The Major turned to see the stout, barrel-chested figure of Brigadier General Clayton at the end of the corridor. Although the general was in his sixties and his

hair was as white as an egret's wing, Clayton still reminded Lansing of a young bull full of energy and stubborn strength.

"I came as soon as Wendy told me about your call, sir," Lansing said.

"You made good time, Major," Clayton replied, "General Norton wants to have a word with you before you begin your investigation."

"I started it when I met the MPs outside," Lansing commented with a wry grin.

"Better see him anyway. Three star generals enjoy giving pep-talks."

Clayton led Lansing into the conference room. Military designers are notoriously uniform and unimaginative. The conference room consisted of a thick artillery-red carpet, a long walnut table with two large glass ashtrays and surrounded by leather armchairs.

Lieutenant General Adam Norton rose from his seat at the head of the table. Although he was less than six feet tall, Norton stood ramrod straight, with a proud majesty that seemed to add inches to his height. His face was deeply lined and his hair was iron gray, but the dark eyes beneath the hooded lids were alert and youthful.

"General Clayton tells me you're the best homicide investigator in USAEUR," Norton said. "Is that true?"

"I'm good at my job, sir," Lansing replied.

The three-star general nodded slightly as he automatically scanned the numerous ribbons tacked to the tunic jacket of Lansing's Class-A uniform. The major had earned most of his decorations as an Airborne Ranger in Vietnam.

"What I am about to say is classified information. Do you understand?" Norton asked as he began to pace slowly.

"Yes, sir," Lansing answered, "I listen to what you say, but I never mention it to anyone."

"Exactly," Norton said. "The meeting scheduled for today concerned the possibility of drastic future changes among our NATO allies. As you may know, at least two countries in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have representatives of their Communist parties in their parliaments. Thus, we may soon see one or more of these nations elect a *legitimate* Communist government into power.

"If so, do we continue to consider them allies or do we expell them from NATO? Indeed, *would* we be *able* to expell them? If we continue to work with them, how far could we trust them? Is it, in fact, safe to trust them even *now*? You can see the problems involved."

"Yes, sir," Lansing assured him.

"If you followed the career of

Major General Myers, you know that he was very critical of recent *detente* efforts, the surrender of U.S. control of the Panama Canal, proposed reduction of American troops in USAEUR and South Korea, and several other plans currently being considered in Washington. It isn't difficult to assume what position Myers would have supported if he had lived to attend the conference.

"What all this means is your investigation must not only find *who* assassinated General Myers, but *why*. Was he killed to disrupt the conference, to prevent him from taking part in the meeting, or as a warning to others not to endorse his views? Also, if any of these reasons were part of the killer's motive, how did the assassin learn about the purpose of this meeting?"

"I can see I have my work cut out for me," Lansing said.

LANSING LEFT the conference room and went directly to the post commander's office. Colonel Barnes didn't appear to be very happy to see the CID investigator as he glanced up from his redoak desk and frowned.

"May I request your assistance concerning my investigation, sir?" Lansing asked, his coat in one hand and his service cap in the other. The colonel's office was heated, not wisely but too well.

"What do you mean?" Barnes asked. He didn't think he'd like

the major's answer.

"I want Danton Barracks temporarily sealed off. No one coming in, no one going out. Any civilian employees that may be on post will be given free meals and lodging and a chance to contact their families to explain why they are being detained. Anyone who doesn't have a phone will be informed by a personal letter from the civilian employee that shall be delivered by a military policeman. Anyone who doesn't obey the restrictions, including civilians *and* officers, may be forcibly confined in a stockade."

"We don't have any stockades on this post," Barnes said.

"You have a guards' quarters for the roving patrol. Offhand, I'd guess it's behind the SP shack."

"Where is the roving patrol supposed to be stationed tonight?"

"It won't be anywhere, sir," Lansing replied. "I'm calling in a squad of MP's to take over the duties of the roving patrol and assist your security police, who aren't really trained or equipped for this sort of thing."

"See, here, Major!" Barnes snapped, jabbing a finger at Lansing, "You can't just come into my post and start giving me orders!"

"I'm not, sir," Lansing assured him. "I'm merely *requesting* your assistance with my investigation."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I'll have to discuss the matter with my superiors, Brigadier General Clayton and Lieutenant General Norton."

"General Norton?" The Colonel gasped, "He isn't CID. What's his concern in this matter?"

"I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to discuss that, sir. But he *is* involved."

Colonel Barnes sighed, "How long will this continue?"

"Only a few days, sir," Lansing promised. "By tomorrow we should have the names of everyone in the color guard and the troops in formation in front of the headquarters building. None of them could be the killer. Several others will also have solid alibis. After we've whittled down the number of suspects, more of your men will be able to return to their regular duties and we'll be able to lift the restrictions one at a time."

"Is all this fuss standard operational procedure with your investigations or is this all because a two-star general was killed?" Barnes wanted to know.

"It isn't S.O.P. and it isn't because of the victim's rank," the Major told him. "There are special security matters involved."

"The conference?"

Lansing nodded.

Colonel Barnes had been in "the Green Machine" long enough to recognize a subject classified *top secret* when he confronted one. And he knew

better than to ask questions that Lansing obviously couldn't answer.

"Is there anything else I can do to help, Major?" Barnes asked sincerely.

"Yes, there is, sir," Lansing said with a half smile. "I'm going to Ansbach to draw the two-o-one files of everyone assigned to Danton Barracks. However, there are certain things about a man that a two-o-one simply doesn't include."

"Such as?"

"Certain political notions. How far someone leans to the right or to the left. Maybe someone has made a few bitter remarks about The United States, the Army or its role in Europe."

"Oh. You mean if someone seems to be a little *red* underneath, eh?" Barnes asked, lowering his voice surreptitiously.

"Not necessarily," Lansing said, wanting to cut off any ideas of witch-hunting before they could form in the Colonel's mind. "Let's just say I'd like to have a conference with all the battery commanders and, in turn, I'd like the BC's to talk to the section chief's under their command. The NCO in charge always knows his men better than the officers. Maybe we'll find somebody with a personal motive to want General Myers dead."

"That can be arranged." The Colonel wrinkled his brow. "Do you think we might have an *enemy*

agent on post?"

"I don't know," Lansing replied. "All we can be sure of is there is a *killer* on post."

SPECIALIST FIFTH CLASS

Wendy Davis was still reading 201 files when Lansing entered his office at CID headquarters. Wendy, an attractive young WAC, had been the major's personal secretary for more than a year. She liked her job and she got along well with her boss. Lansing removed his hat, revealing his short brown hair laced with gray at the temples. He gazed gratefully at the coffee maker at one end of the room.

"I was beginning to wonder if you'd had an accident on those icy roads," Wendy said. "You were gone quite a while. Any luck with the local police?"

"The *Polizei* weren't able to answer all my questions. I had to go to Nuremburg to *das Burgerrecht Register* for information about the immigrants." Lansing shed his overcoat, "Six civilian KPs are working at Danton Barracks. Only one of them is a *Deutschlander*. Three are Turks that shuffled down here from Berlin, and the other two are Greeks. The Germans have very complete records of every *Auslander* living here. Only one of the Turks speaks any English and the other five can barely communicate in German. There's nothing to suggest any of them

even knew who General Myers was, let alone want to kill him."

"What about the German?"

"He's a member of *Deutschlandlers fur Freiheit*, sort of a German version of The John Birch Society."

Wendy's eyes widened. "You mean some kind of right wing, neo-Nazi group?"

Lansing shook his head. "Nazis are National Socialists, which puts them to the political left. Anyway, Herr Weisheit is a very unlikely suspect for the murder of an American general who was noted for an anti-Communist stance."

"Aren't there other civilian employees at Danton?"

"A few wives of GI's work in the PX and the snack bar, but they're even more improbable suspects. Apparently the murderer is a serviceman assigned to Danton Barracks."

"Well, I've examined these records as you told me to." Wendy handed a number of file folders to Lansing. "These are the two-ones of the men once under General Myers's command, who are now stationed at Danton Barracks."

"What about Shields and Harris?"

"Their folders are included," Wendy assured him, "Why are they top suspects, sir? I didn't notice anything in their records to connect either man with Myers."

"Yesterday I had a little pow-wow with Danton's battery

commanders. Shields and Harris are known to have rather radical political views. The question is: Are they radical enough to kill anyone that disagrees with them."

"Oh, yes!" Wendy exclaimed as she gathered up a clipboard, "I almost forgot to give you this. It's the autopsy report."

"Let's see. 'Death was caused by a single puncture wound to the left ventricle of Myers's heart. The projectile used was a primitive arrow constructed of a branch from a white pine tree, pigeon feathers and a crude, but sharp, aluminum arrowhead. Although the wound itself was fatal, the arrow shaft was slit and filled with a potentially lethal dose of arsenic.'" Lansing grunted, "The assassin didn't believe in taking chances."

"Is it possible the killer was a professional hit man of some kind who managed to slip in and out of Danton Barracks without being observed?"

"Anything is possible," Lansing admitted, "but I still think it was an inside job. The murderer must have known the base like the proverbial back of his hand to be able to find his way in that clock tower."

"This sounds like it's going to be a tough case, sir."

"There aren't any easy ones."

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS Stanley Harris was trying to repair a damaged field radio when Lansing

found him in Charlie Battery's communication section. Harris was a husky young man with dark blond hair and a drooping moustache. The CID investigator introduced himself as Harris put down his screwdriver and rose from the work bench. He didn't come to attention as required by military courtesy, but Lansing didn't reprimand him.

"I want to talk to you about General Myers," Lansing said.

"What about him, sir?" Harris shrugged. "I mean, I know about him getting wasted yesterday, but I never met the guy ... that is, the General."

"What *did* you know about him?"

"I knew what everybody knew about him. He was a critic of any policy that wasn't dog-crazy for the U.S. of A and the Army."

"You're in the Army. There isn't any draft so you must have enlisted. Why?"

Harris cocked his head thoughtfully. "Do you want a bunch of patriotic crap or do you want the truth?"

"If you think patriotism is crap I can guess the truth," Lansing said. "You were probably arrested as a civilian and, as a first offender, given a choice of military service or a possible prison sentence."

"I should have taken it to a trial. I was framed."

"Yeah," Lansing muttered without conviction, "I suppose

you were innocent of the charges that resulted in an Article Fifteen last year, chopping you down from a spec. four to a PFC."

"That." Harris clucked his tongue, "A big deal over nothing."

"Inappropriate civilian clothing, if I recall correctly."

"You've either read my two-o-one or you talked to my BC."

"Both."

"So I had an American flag decal on the seat of a pair of Levis, so what?"

"You don't seem to think much of The United States."

"It has the wrong kind of government, that's all. The Constitution is outdated and Capitalism is nothing but a system to benefit the wealthy."

"You sound like what our German hosts would call a *Komodiant*."

"What's that? A *Communist*?" Harris grinned, "*True* Communism would be a Utopia with everybody working and sharing equally. Those guys in the Soviet Union just loused up the original concepts of Karl Marx and gave it a bad name."

"Funny how it hasn't worked any better in China, Cuba or Vietnam," Lansing pointed out.

"Hey, I'm a *Socialist* not a Commie," Harris protested.

"Well, Sweden has gone to hell in a handbasket and The People sure missed the paradise boat in Guyana, but so much for your

politics. How did you feel about that nasty Capitalist, General Myers?"

"I get it!" Harris exclaimed, "You think because I'm a Left-winger I'd kill Myers for being a Right-wing war lover."

"As I understand it, you were here in the Commo section when the general was murdered."

"All by myself," Harris admitted, "I was working on a couple of these damned field radios at the time, but *they* can't give me much of an alibi."

"I noticed—according to your records you scored *expert* with the M-16 in BCT at Fort Knox. That's pretty good. Have you ever handled a bow and arrow?"

"Sure, when I was a kid." Harris grinned. "I dig. The same principles are involved with rifle marksmanship and archery. Only one problem: I didn't kill him. Of course, I suppose I'd be a better scapegoat then most, huh?"

"I never arrest scapegoats," Lansing assured him as he turned to leave. "Only murderers."

AFTER STUDYING the 201 files, Lansing discovered that five men stationed at Danton Barracks had known the late General Myers, either in Vietnam or Stateside. Of these, two had been standing in formation by the HQ building when Myers was killed, one was working in an S-Two section in the basement of Danton's headquarters with three witnesses,

and the fourth was on leave in Spain.

Number five was Sergeant First Class Stewart Bingham. Currently the NCO in charge of Delta Battery's mess hall, Bingham was a neat, slender man, a head shorter and almost ten years younger than the six-foot-three, forty-four-year-old Lansing. The CID investigator entered the mess hall through the kitchen to find the cooks and kitchen patrol busy preparing the evening meal for several hundred men. SFC Bingham was standing near an enormous oven, arguing with a bearded civilian KP.

"*Der Lohn ist allzu Klein*," the KP complained, his German heavily accented and awkward.

"*Kussen Mein Hindre!*" the NCO snapped, "*Gehen Sie Arbeiten! Schnell!*"

The sulking Greek stomped away as Lansing approached the non com. "Sergeant Bingham?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," the NCO replied, snapping to attention. Dressed in a spotless white cook's uniform, Bingham resembled a tall, thin glass of milk.

"I'm Lansing, CID. I'd like to talk to you about the death of General Myers."

"Terrible thing, wasn't it, sir?" Bingham said, shaking his head slowly, a frown pulling down the features of his long face. "The general was a very great man. I served under him in

Vietnam when he was still a colonel in Special Forces."

"I know," Lansing said. "And it was a helluva fighting unit. But didn't you and the Colonel have a falling out of sorts?"

"Falling out?" Bingham wrinkled his brow, "Oh! You must have read my two-o-one file. Are you talking about the fact that Colonel Myers transferred me from Vietnam to the States in 1970?"

"He'd also given you a Field Grade Article Fifteen, busting you from buck sergeant to PFC."

"He *had* to do that," Bingham said, "You see, I was in a bar in Saigon one night, and I was forced to kill a ROK Marine in self-defense. Since the South Koreans were our allies in 'Nam, the brass — that is the *American* Army brass — wanted my scalp. General McLaine was all for frying my ass with a *General* Courtmartial. However, Colonel Myers knew I didn't deserve to get kicked out of the service, so he did the only thing he could and charged me with the Article Fifteen instead."

"So you didn't resent Myers for his actions in 'Nam?"

"Resent him? He probably saved my life! A Korean captain wanted to put me in front of a firing squad. Those damn ROK Marines have an 'eye-for-an-eye' sense of justice."

"I recall reading a letter of commendation from Myers in your file. He said you served him quite

well during special missions in the Iron Triangle and Nan Choy. You were a sniper, weren't you?"

"Sometimes."

"Didn't you specialize in taking out sentries with a crossbow?"

"Occasionally." Suddenly, Bingham's eyes widened, "My God! You think I killed him!"

"I'm still weeding out suspects."

"Well, weed we out right *now*, damn it!" Bingham snapped.

"The general was the finest soldier in this man's Army. How many other officers have had the guts to tell that idiot in The White House he's wrong? You can count them on one hand and never touch your pinkie finger! I was delighted when I discovered the General would be attending the special meeting..."

Lansing raised an eyebrow. "You knew about the conference?"

"Sure. It was in the newspaper," Bingham said. "Besides, Colonel Barnes was getting this base ready for some sort of big event even before the story appeared in print and rumors were circulating concerning his reason."

"So much for security," Lansing muttered. "I take it you agreed with General Myers' politics?"

"One hundred percent! The reds have been swarming all over Africa because they've found little resistance there. Pull out our

USAEUR forces and they'll start moving into Europe quicker than you can say *Auf Wiedersehen!*"

"Do you think the Communists killed General Myers?"

"Probably. Who else would have any reason to want to stop him?"

"I guess it's my job to find out," Lansing sighed as he moved to the exit. Turning, he said, "By the way, do you ever have any problems with rats?"

"Every professional kitchen has problems with vermin, sir. Why?"

"I'm just curious. Do you use poison to deal with them?"

"No. We just set traps and maybe use a little D-Con from time to time. That's about all they sell in the PX."

"I see." Lansing nodded. "Thanks." He left the comfort of the well heated mess hall to enter the frigid world outside.

LANSING WAS SURPRISED to discover Lieutenant General Adam Norton waiting for him in his office when he returned to CID headquarters that evening. Wendy Davis stared up at the major and shrugged helplessly. The General sat woodenly in a chair near Lansing's desk, his eyes revealing mild interest as the junior officer came to attention.

"As you were, Major," Norton said. "I'd like to speak with you confidentially."

"You can call it a day, Wendy. We'll have plenty of work to-

morrow. At least one suspect's story needs to be checked out and I want some information concerning any recent sales of arsenic or rat poison. See you in the morning."

"Yes, sir," she said, eagerly heading for the door.

"Thank you for your charming company while I waited here, Specialist." General Norton said with a smile and a twinkle in his eyes. She returned the smile awkwardly as she left. Norton watched her appreciately until the door closed.

"Ah, well," the General sighed. "On to business. How's the investigation coming, Major?"

"I've talked to two primary suspects," Lansing replied as he removed his hat and coat. "A third possibility wasn't available for questioning. He was the duty driver for Bravo Battery today and spent the afternoon taking the XO to and from Bamberg. I'll interview him tomorrow."

"Tomorrow is Saturday. You may have trouble finding him."

"Danton Barracks is still supposed to be closed, but the fact that one of my chief suspects managed to drive through the front gate with the executive officer proves the restrictions aren't being taken too seriously."

"I know. Colonel Barnes doesn't seem to have proper concern for security," the General said. "What happened yesterday is proof of that."

"I wouldn't say the security

breach was entirely the colonel's fault, sir," Lansing said, wishing he hadn't started to contradict a three-star general. "Guarding against a sniper attack is almost impossible."

"You said 'entirely' Barnes's fault." Norton said stiffly, "Does that mean you feel security measures were lacking elsewhere?"

Too late to back out now. Lansing thought, as he cleared his throat and said, "Yes, sir. I do. Barnes knew about the conference two months in advance. Unfortunately, a peacetime army tends to be more concerned with ceremony and less concerned with security. It was perfectly natural for Barnes to concentrate on putting on a 'good show'. Hell, isn't that all an AGI inspection is? The Inspector General knows he isn't seeing an Army base functioning on a day-to-day basis when he finds half the personnel dressed in Class A's, and every waste basket looking like new."

"Do you think we told Barnes about the meeting too soon, or didn't we stress the secretive nature of the conference?"

Lansing wished Norton hadn't said *we*, but he replied, "Frankly, *both*, sir. A forty-eight hour notice should have been sufficient. As for the emphasis for security, I don't see that there was *any*. *The Stars and Stripes* and *The Overseas Weekly* knew about the meeting. One of them even

printed an article about it a month in advance! I understand the logic behind making a top secret operation *appear* to be a casual one, but can you honestly blame Colonel Barnes for setting up his troops for a parade instead of posting guards?"

"You have a good point, Major," Norton admitted with another deep sigh. "But you should realize that all levels of government, including the military, have been under pressure since the Watergate scandal to conduct their activities more or less in the open. Even highly confidential meetings are given partial press coverage for the sake of public relations with the civilians."

Yeah, but top secret is still top secret and public relations be damned! Lansing thought, but he knew most generals are half politician, so he merely said, "At any rate, sir, whoever the killer is, he may have easily learned that General Myers would be at the meeting. All he had to do was read the papers."

"That he knew Myers would be there is obvious, but did he know the reason for the conference? The *purpose* of our meeting was *not* common knowledge. Is some clandestine or terrorist organization involved?"

"I'm afraid I can't honestly answer either question at this time, General," Lansing admitted.

"I certainly hope you come up with some answers soon," Norton said as he rose from his chair, "If we have a security leak at USAEUR headquarters level, then *all* our forces in Europe may be in jeopardy."

SPECIALIST FOURTH CLASS

Frank Two Shields didn't seem to notice the cold wind that tore at his exposed copper-brown face as he pulled back the bowstring. Lansing watched Shields aim the sixty-five-pound Browning compound bow at the paper target tacked to a bail of hay roughly one hundred and twenty yards away. Shields released the string. The hum of the bow was consumed by the violent hiss of the arrow before it slammed into the target, missing the bull's eye by less than an inch.

"That's very good," Lansing said as he waded through the shin-deep snow behind the Danton Barracks NCO club.

"I've done better," Shields replied. He was a short, thickly-built man with a round, flat face and dark, close set eyes.

"Have you ever shot anything that moved?" Lansing asked casually as he approached the archer.

"You mean like a deer?"

"Anything in *general*."

Shields snorted, "You must be that CID snøop. I guess you figure I'm dumb enough to kill General

Myers and then, two days later, get my bow and arrows out of the unit arms rooms to do some target practice, huh?"

"Whether you killed him or not, I'd say it isn't a very bright thing to do," Lansing commented flatly.

"Your battery commander told me you were an archery buff. He said you come out here every Saturday morning, regardless of the weather, to practice."

"And that makes me a murder suspect?" Shields notched another arrow to the bowstring.

"It helps," Lansing admitted. "Where were you when the general was busy dying?"

"I was in the motor pool working on my jeep. It had a hole in its muffler I had to patch."

"According to your NCOIC, you weren't in the motor pool when he checked on your jeep at 1420 Hours."

"Okay, so I put a bandage on my muffler and jogged over to the snack bar and goofed off for about an hour or so. That makes me guilty of being a goldbrick, not a killer."

"How much did you know about General Myers?" Lansing asked.

"Enough to know he was no damn good," Shields said as he drew back the bowstring and aimed at the target. "No damn good at all!" He released the string, blasting the arrow into the bull's-eye.

"What did you have against Myers?"

"He was a bigot and a white supremacist. The type of Manifest Destiny sonofabitch that enslaved my black brothers and stole my ancestor's country two hundred years ago. The kind of bastard that enjoys calling orientals 'gooks' and Latinos 'spics.' The kind of Whitey that keeps my people on crummy reservations."

"What did Myers ever do to earn that sort of criticism?"

"Everything!" Shield grated through clenched teeth, "He took part in the genocide of the Vietnamese. He supported establishing relations with racist Rhodesia and opposed the recognition of China. His entire life was devoted to 'White is Right!'"

"Are you an advocate of what the German's call, *Das Drittel wortlich?*"

"*The Third World.*" Shields smiled grimly. "Does that frighten you, Major? The non-white population is no longer going to be dominated by your race. We outnumber you, and we're finally joining forces. The world will belong to us in the future."

"I'm glad only white people can be bigots, or I might mistake you for one," Lansing said dryly. "Since you've chosen to cut down your Navajo name of 'Two Shields' to the white-sounding 'Shields', and you were raised in Los Angeles and not on an Indian reservation, I'm also tempted to think you're full of crap."

Shields stared angrily at Lansing, "The only one of your opinions that concerns me is whether you still think I killed Myers."

"You didn't do a very good job at dispelling my suspicions."

"Look, I hated Myers and I hated everything he stood for, but I wouldn't have killed him."

"Why not?"

"Why should I have done him any favors? If he was left to his own evil devices, he'd be old news in a week. Now, he's somebody special, the victim of an assassination. A white man's version of Martin Luther King. A twentieth century *Custer.*"

"Maybe," Lansing said. "But it's my job to find the 'Sitting-Bull' responsible for 'The Little Big Horn' in front of the headquarters building. And: Whether he's white, black, red or calico, I'll find him." The major vowed before he turned to trudge through the snow.

"Ugh!" Shields muttered sourly as he prepared another arrow.

SP5 WENDY DAVIS hung up the telephone less than a minute before Major Lansing entered the office. His tunic-style overcoat was dripping wet from melted snow as blizzard conditions began to dominate the German winter.

"Warrant Officer Page called a moment ago, sir," she told him.

"Who?"

"Mr. Page served under General Myers in Vietnam," Wendy explained. "He remembers Sergeant Bingham and the incident that caused Bingham to get shipped back to the States."

"What did he say?"

"He claims to have seen Bingham shoot the ROK Marine in Saigon. According to him, it was self defense. Page also confirms Bingham's story about why Myers gave him a Field Grade Article Fifteen. General McLaine wanted to burn Bingham with a General Courtmartial, and Myers could only save him by enforcing a lesser, non-judicial, punishment. As Page recalls, Bingham seemed to be very grateful to then-Colonel Myers."

"I'd still like to discuss this case with General McLaine. Did you find any information about his current address?"

"Yes, sir. Newton Cemetary, Newton, Iowa. McLaine died three years ago."

"Okay," Lansing muttered as he slipped off his soggy coat, "Have you heard from all the PX's and military supply centers about recent sales of arsenic?"

"Yes, sir." Wendy consulted her notebook, "No PX in USAEUR currently carries arsenic among its stock. The only rat-killing substance sold is D-Con which doesn't contain arsenic. Although some insecticides still include arsenic, none of them are sold in USAEUR."

Now, arsenic is also used in the preparation of certain drugs and medicines, but these are sent straight from the airport to the Army hospitals in Frankfurt, Berlin or Nuremburg. They are not sold by the hospitals nor have there been any reports of any stolen quantities of arsenic or arsenic-based medicines."

"Well, I didn't get very much from the German authorities," Lansing sighed. "Arsenic-based rat poison is sold across the counter in many local stores. However, German Nationals are restricted by law from selling such poisons to *Auslanders*, including American servicemen. The *Polizei* don't have any information concerning stolen arsenic, but we all know what the black market is like here. If one knows the right people (or the wrong ones, depending on one's point of view), one can illegally purchase anything from a kilo of hashish to a mounted machine gun. I'm sure arsenic and other poisons are available as well."

"I suppose, due to the devaluation of the dollar, *most* of our servicemen do a little small time black market," Wendy mused. "But they wouldn't get connections with gun runners, drug pushers and poison peddlers just by selling a few cigarettes and some booze for a few extra *Deutschmarks*."

"Probably not," Lansing agreed, "Perhaps we should con-

tact USAEUR Intelligence Headquarters and, possible, the Central Intelligence Agency stationed at Bonn."

"The CIA?" Wendy asked with a start, "What for?"

"Harris and Shields." Lansing replied. "They both have rather radical political views, but we don't really know if they've been associating with any local Marxists or suspected terrorists. Maybe the cloak and dagger boys will have a little information about them."

"Well, it's nearly 1800 hours, sir. Do you want me to try to contact their offices now or tomorrow morning?"

"In the morning," Lansing decided. "We can talk about it then. Tonight I have other plans. I want to check out something before the restrictions are lifted from Danton Barracks."

"What's that, sir?"

"Is Doyle still upstairs? I'll probably need to borrow his lock picks."

"You *know* who the killer is, don't you?"

"Let's just say I have a strong suspicion," he said.

"A suspicion about *whom*?"

"Wendy," Lansing said, "you know that I'm taking some lock picks with me, which means I might be bending some regulations by doing some breaking-and-entering somewhere tonight."

"So?"

"So the less you know, the less

you can be an accomplice to."

THE STURDY LITTLE white Volkswagen plowed through the snowbound streets as Lansing drove into the housing district. The military constructed such districts for the use of officers, high-ranking non-coms (E-6 and above), and enlisted men with wives or families in Europe, to live comfortably off base. The cost of renting a German apartment is more than most Army salaries can cope with. Lansing had visited dozens of housing districts throughout USAEUR. They were all monotonous, with uniform concrete-and-glass apartment buildings and square-shaped lawns.

Finding the address he'd copied from a 201 file, Lansing parked the Volkswagen in a not-too-recently-shoveled driveway. He pulled back his sleeve to see his wrist watch, noting it was 2025 hours (eight-twenty-five PM). The black winter sky, however, was dark enough for midnight as Lansing emerged from the diminutive car. Half-frozen snow crunched under his feet as he walked to the apartment building.

Lansing briefly considered borrowing a passkey from the landlord. He dismissed the notion, as he'd have to explain his reason for wanting the key. If the suspect were innocent, it would be an injustice to case a shadow on his reputation. Lansing decided to

simply pick the lock of the apartment, conduct a fast search and leave.

Mounting the stairs, Lansing entered a corridor on the third floor and soon discovered Room 243. Inserting a pick, Lansing easily worked the plain tumbler lock and opened the door. Entering the dark apartment, he quickly closed the door and flicked on a penlight. The front room was neatly furnished Army issue chairs and a vinyl couch. There was no carpet; the wooden floor had been waxed and polished as if prepared for an inspection.

Opening a desk drawer, Lansing found carefully arranged display cases with several medals and ribbons. Another drawer revealed shaving equipment, razor, soap, comb and shaving cream neatly lined up in an orderly, military manner. Lansing steered the penlight beam into a wastebasket. It was not only empty, it had been vigorously scrubbed and washed.

Lansing moved to a door. Even the brass knob appeared to have been polished. He opened the door and entered a small, spartanly-designed bedroom. A regulation bunk was placed near one corner, a variety of military and civilian footgear lined up beneath it. Then the penlight beam fell upon the dresser cabinet.

The cabinet resembled an altar. A number of newspaper clippings were taped to the mirror in the center of the dresser. A

tall black candle burned at either side of the mirror. Stepping closer, Lansing saw that the clippings were about the late General Myers, including two grainy photographs of the dead man.

He felt an icy centipede crawl up his spine as he stared at the altar. The macabre memorial to Myers proved that Lansing's suspicions had been correct. It also proved that the owner was utterly demented. Yet Lansing considered the candles the most distressing discovery. They were lit! Lansing was not alone.

The creak of poorly-treated door hinges drew his attention. His penlight illuminated the stern, long face of SFC Stewart Bingham as the sergeant emerged from the bathroom. He held a primitive, handmade bow, an arrow drawn back on its string, in his hands.

"I thought it might be you," Bingham said woodenly. "When I heard somebody in the other room, I thought it might be you."

"How did you get off post, Sergeant?" Lansing asked, raising his hands. He silently cursed himself for not bringing a gun.

"There's a hole in the fence surrounding Danton Barracks. Your MP's didn't notice it because some bushes conceal it, but the hole is large enough for a man to crawl through," Bingham replied calmly holding the drawn bow at hip level. "Why did you come here?"

"I thought I might find some

evidence that you killed General Myers ... although I didn't expect to find all this," Lansing admitted as he backed up toward the altar. "Why did you take such a risk to come here tonight?"

"For him." Bingham stared at the picture taped to the mirror. "He deserves proper homage. You don't understand why I killed General Myers, do you?"

"I think I do," Lansing replied. "Oddly enough, it was a left-wing, Third World advocate that gave me a clue. If Myers had lived, he'd be last week's news. Dead, he's a hero."

"*He was always a hero!*" Bingham snapped. "That's why he had to die. Every great cause needs a great martyr. The Boston Massacre, Joan of Arc, Christ on the Cross — all were necessary. America never would have gone to war against the Axis Powers if there hadn't been hundreds of martyrs at Pearl Harbor. Thanks to his violent death, General Myers will be remembered and the things that he stood for will gain support."

"You know," Lansing said, glancing at the candle a few inches from his right hand. "You aren't going to be able to live with yourself. The general's death will be too much for you to bear."

"I don't feel any guilt!" Bingham insisted, his eyes bulging and his voice adopting a near-hysterical tremble. "I did what had to be done!"

"And do you *have* to kill me as well?" the major asked, gazing down at the jagged point of the aluminum arrowhead aimed at his chest.

"Yes." The sergeant grimly raised the bow and slowly drew the arrow back, "You'd tell them why I did it. That would ruin everything. I'm sorry."

"Well, that makes two of *us!*" Lansing said, shouting the last word as he whipped out his hand, sweeping the candle off the cabinet to hurl it at Bingham.

Lansing dropped to the floor as Bingham released the arrow. The missile sizzled over the prone major and smashed through the mirror, its crude metal point biting deeply into plaster. Lansing scrambled to his feet as the startled NCO snarled with rage and swung the bow like a club.

Although anger added speed to Bingham's attack, it also robbed him of his self control. Lansing dodged the wild swipe and deftly kicked the bow out of Bingham's grasp. A former Special Forces soldier, the non-com quickly assumed a defensive "horse" stance. However, Bingham hadn't practiced any martial arts since Vietnam. Lansing, on the other hand, wasn't rusty.

Before Bingham had fully recovered from his surprise, Lansing stabbed his fingertips of his stiffened right hand into the NCO's solar plexus. Even as his

wind rushed from his lungs painfully, Bingham thrust his entire body at the major. Lansing met the charge, catching Bingham's sleeve with one hand and his lapel with the other.

Bending his left knee, Lansing fell back, absorbing the shock with his left thigh as his right foot rose to meet Bingham's midriff. He rolled on his back, pumping his right leg hard to send Bingham sailing overhead. The judo throw smashed the non-com to the floor with bone-jarring force. He was too dazed to struggle as Lansing quickly produced a pair of handcuffs and moved in to restrain him.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL Adam Norton entered Lansing's office the following morning. The major and SP5 Wendy Davis snapped to attention, but Norton told them, "Relax. As you were."

"Well, Major," the general began, "congratulations. I was very pleased to hear that you arrested General Myers' assassin. It's a pity about Bingham. I understand he was once a fine soldier."

"I know, sir," Lansing sighed, "Somehow, we can only guess *when* Bingham went off the deep end. I don't know what the psychologists will call it, but the sergeant has a very sick mind. He should have gotten mental assistance a long time ago, perhaps after his trial ... " The CID investigator shrugged helplessly.

"I still don't understand how

you decided Bingham was the killer," Norton admitted. "After all, murdering someone to create a martyr is a rather unlikely motive. You must have had more evidence to base your suspicions on."

"The arsenic was the clue," Lansing replied. "Even before we checked with the PX and medical supplies, I suspected the poison may have been purchased in a local *German* store. That meant the killer had to speak German well enough to pretend to be a National. I tested Harris and Shields when I interviewed them. Harris thought a *Komodiant*, a *comedian*, meant '*Communist*'. I mentioned *Das Drittel wortlich* to Shields, who thought I was talking about *The Third World*. *Wortlich* means '*literal*', not *world*. However, when I encountered Bingham in the mess hall, he was having a rather heated argument with a KP in fluent, if rather rude, German."

"I see." Norton nodded. "That's how you build your hunches, eh?"

"In *this* case, yes, sir."

"Well, I'm relieved that no USAEUR security leak was involved. Now we can start planning to reschedule our conference," Norton said with a thin smile. "But this time we won't release any information in advance."

Too bad it took a man's life to make you cautious! Lansing thought, but he merely nodded in silence. ●

Born-Again Killer

by BETTY REN WRIGHT

He took the gun from the desk drawer and cocked his head, listening for her. There would be no stopping him. He would kill her, unless she got away — now!

IT HAD BEGUN with an inspiration for the perfect anniversary gift, something Carolyn hoped would ease John's growing irritability. She refused to cater to her husband's mood, but she thought a gift as unexpected as a genealogy chart might deflect his sudden remoteness. Besides, the research would give her something to do. She was, she had discovered, quite bored with her life.

Improbably, the project had brought her here to the police department and the desk of Detective Tomaszek, a ruddy,

gentleseeming man in his sixties, who sat at a glass-covered desk papered with innumerable snapshots of small children and listened patiently to Carolyn's lie — that she had chosen Gregory Crane to write about for a night school assignment because he happened to have the same last name as hers and because he was an Interesting Person. A strange choice, the detective's expression told her. But he obligingly pulled an ancient file from a drawer and repeated much of what she had already learned from microfilms

at the City Library. Gregory Crane, schoolteacher, husband and father, had lived an unexceptional life in Columbus, Ohio until he was fifty. Then, quietly, methodically, he had proceeded to murder everyone close to him.

"I've thought about that fellow a lot," Detective Tomaszek confided. "I was working in Columbus then — that's why they sent you to talk to me — and Crane was the first killer I ever met. He *became* one, if you see what I mean — almost as if a disease hit him one day. If he was clinically insane, no one ever proved it. The most they said against him was that he was a moody son-of-a-gun. And the only thing he said in his own defense was that he had to do it, couldn't explain why. Looked like he just became a murderer at a certain age, the way other men get gray hair or stooped shoulders."

Carolyn shook her head. "I can't accept that," she said sharply. "Murder for no reason at all. He *must* have been insane."

Detective Tomaszek smiled, as if whatever conclusion she reached was all right with him. He looked from one to another of the children who stared placidly through the coffee-spotted glass. "Possibly. Seems as if he had the background for it. His older brother — the first one he killed — had an interesting history of his own. He went out west to visit his wife's

family, and during the two weeks he was there, both his wife's parents died. Father fell down some stairs, mother was electrocuted when a radio fell into her bath. Couple of weeks after he came home, a young brother-in-law died and a sister-in-law became very sick. The police found arsenic in the sugar and the salt in that family's kitchen, but they didn't have time to accuse Elton Crane. They were on their way to talk to him when he was murdered himself. Gregory used poison, too, but something more subtle than arsenic, as I recall."

Carolyn pretended to consult her notes. "His son —" she murmured. "Didn't Gregory have a son?"

The detective nodded again. "Right. Never talked to John, though. He was just fourteen or fifteen when Crane was arrested. The kid just disappeared. Either he didn't want to face what had happened to his family or he was one of the victims, and his body was never found. I tried for a long time to trace him, but —"

Carolyn stood up and stuffed her notes into her handbag.

"You look kinda pale, Mrs. Crane," the detective said. He shifted his comfortable bulk. "Your husband's name is John Crane. Are you thinking maybe he knows something about what happened to that kid?"

She tried a laugh. "Hardly. My John doesn't have any relatives in

the Midwest. He was born and raised in California, and so were his parents. They died there in a freeway accident, and John was raised by an aunt and uncle in Los Angeles. He visits them whenever he goes out there on business trips." She hurried on, afraid the detective might ask her if she had ever met them herself. "Anyway, thanks much for your help. If you think of anything else I could use in my story —"

"I'll give you a call. But I don't think there's much else to tell. Not about Crane himself. He died in prison thirty years ago, and that was that. I was transferred to Milwaukee soon after I read later that his father had probably killed Gregory's mother — the old man ran away and nothing was ever proved — and his grandfather set fire to his own house. Family barely escaped. One of them didn't. With ancestors like that, guess nowadays a smart lawyer would have had Gregory psychoanalyzed and sent to a nice cozy sanitarium instead of to Death Row. He was born too soon."

He was still chuckling over the arbitrary quality of fate when Carolyn said good-bye and went down the narrow stairway to the main floor. The young officer at the desk smiled and nodded as she passed him.

"Find out everything you wanted to know?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Good luck with your story."

CAROLYN WENT OUT into the light of an ordinary afternoon. There were mother with babies, an old man pushing a grocery cart, a child staring into a variety store window. An ordinary day — and the day when she had discovered she was almost certainly married to a murder's son, a man who, in some unexplained way, might have inherited the genes that would make him a killer. Her comfortable, dull world had fallen away in a soundless quake, and she stood by herself now, numb with shock.

Scenes from the last few months pressed around her. John's personality had definitely changed. He had never been a buoyant, talkative person; now he was quieter than ever, breaking his silence occasionally with unreasonable bursts of anger. His lovemaking was rare and seemed, in some faintly insulting way, almost dutiful. She had thought at first that there must be problems at the store, but when she asked, he told her the hardware business had never been better. His dark mood continued, and she had decided to ignore it. Actually, it had been a kind of relief to find some change — any change — in a relationship that had become stagnant. She wondered if John felt the same way.

The inspiration to trace his family tree and present him with a beautifully-drawn chart had come after she happened upon his birth certificate. The name Gregory

Crane had meant nothing to her that day, but the discovery that John had been born in Ohio was startling. He had always made a point of saying his family were native Californians. With a feeling of unease, she had gone to the City Library to begin her research. There she found an astonishing list of references under the name of Gregory Crane, and for the first time she recalled some unpleasantness connected with the name. In the serenity of the reading room she learned the details of his crimes and noted his victims — his brother, his wife, his children — all except fourteen-year-old John who had disappeared the day of the murders and was not seen again. "Look, lady, you like the view from this curb, okay, but let the rest of us get by, right?"

Carolyn mumbled an apology and stepped aside. It was coming together in her mind now — the boy who had run away when he discovered his father was a murderer and had somehow made his way to the West Coast. Perhaps there really had been a sympathetic relative there to take him in, or perhaps the reunions he described now, whenever he returned from business trips to California, were wholly imaginary — part of a fantasy designed to keep her, and everyone else, from looking too deeply into his past. Considered in that way, it was pathetic — the runaway boy

growing up without anyone who knew his terrible secret, inventing a family and even a foster family as he needed them. But there was something else, and now, beyond the pathos, beyond the shock that had come with Detective Tomaszek's confirmation of what she had read and guessed, she was experiencing feelings of betrayal and anger, feelings so overwhelming she could hardly contain them.

John was fifty. The strangeness she had noticed recently could be the beginning of a breakdown, the same terrible illness that had destroyed his father, his grandfather, and his uncle. He must be aware of that change, just as he had been aware when he married her of what his inheritance might be. From their first date, and their first night together, with all his protestations of love and caring, he had known that by marrying her he was putting her life in danger. He had known! It was a horror that shaded every good memory she had of their fifteen years together.

For the first time, she was grateful that they didn't have children. If she had to worry about the safety of children — if she had to think she had innocently produced *another generation of murders...*

She found the car, and as she drove through the suburban streets to their quiet lane, she tried to think what she should do

next. There was danger; she was certain of it. But how could she protect herself? The thought of having to protect herself from John was strange beyond imagining.

THE COOL STILLNESS of her house offered no solace, and that was another unpleasant surprise. It had always seemed more her house than John's — his hours at the store were long — but now he and his incredible secret had invaded every room. This was the chair where he sat to read the evening paper — but what was he really thinking when he appeared to read and doze and read again? This was their bed where he fell into quick, heavy sleep each night — but was he really sleeping? The poison of her new knowledge touched everything in the house, and her feeling of betrayal grew as she realized that she had lost not only her husband, but her home as well.

She went into the den and stood, hesitating for a moment, in front of John's desk. He had never wanted her to touch anything in it or on it, and she had respected his wishes after one quick peek, early in their marriage, had disclosed nothing more interesting than store records and insurance papers. Now she decided to take another look.

The center drawer held pencils, notepads, a ruler. The top left drawer held folders and a gun. She

stared at the gun without moving. She had never looked at one closely before; so far as she knew, there had never been one in their house. When had John bought it? And why? Little need to wonder. If he had wanted it because he was concerned about someone breaking in, he would have mentioned it. No, the gun had deliberately been kept secret; it was part of what was happening to him.

She picked it up, surprised at the ease with which her hand fitted itself around the cool metal. With the gun in her hand, she felt as if the last vestige of the life she had known was gone. The safe, respectable husband, the safe and peaceful home, would not return. She must look after herself now. Blind luck had provided her with a warning.

She considered hiding the gun, but after a moment's thought she decided that would be too obvious and might hasten a confrontation. She could get a gun of her own, but that idea did not suit her. She could hardly carry a gun around with her all day and sleep with it in her hand at night. It was more important to make plans — long-range plans to get away. Those other families, the wives and children of earlier Cranes, had had no intimation of what was going to happen to them. She was more fortunate, and she would have to make the most of what she had learned.

At five John called from the

store to say he wouldn't be home for dinner because he had too much to do. She was relieved, grateful that she wouldn't have to see him for a while longer. With each passing minute, it seemed, she felt less like a wife. John Crane was no longer her husband but an enemy, and she was justified in looking for a way to get out of his life while there was still time.

She fixed her favorite supper, an omelet and salad, glad to forget the meat-and-potatoes menu John insisted on. Then she checked her bankbook and totaled up the sizable amount her mother had left her and the value of her jewelry. She could leave tomorrow, if she wished, and live comfortably for weeks, even months. Once she was settled, she would write to John and tell him what she had learned about his family.

She would keep her location a secret, work through a lawyer to get a divorce as quickly as possible. Since she was the one who was leaving, she probably wouldn't be able to claim support, but, strangely, it didn't matter. After fifteen years of being safe, she would be on her own. That would be exciting.

At ten she went to bed, and when John came in at eleven, she pretended to be asleep. Through slitted eyes she watched his methodical movements around the bedroom. If he had touched her,

she would have panicked — the thought of his hands was terrifying — but he barely glanced at her, and when he settled into bed, he began a gentle snoring almost immediately. She listened for a while, trying to decide if the snores were authentic, then fell asleep herself.

She woke in the morning with the thought that something pleasant was about to happen. The feeling remained, even when yesterday's discoveries rushed over her. She could hear John moving around downstairs, and she decided to stay in bed, nursing the moment, until he left the house.

When the back door closed, she got up, put on a robe, and hurried downstairs. There was one thing she had to know — a gauge to help her decide how fast she must move. She opened the desk drawer, and as John backed the car down the driveway, she saw that the gun was still there. If he had taken it with him, she would know he planned to act soon — perhaps slip back during the day and kill her as she passed a window or sat in the garden. But he had not, and so she had another few hours, at least, to plan. She decided on a quick cup of coffee and a visit to a travel agent where she would decide on a destination and make the necessary reservations.

Later it would seem to her that the thing that happened that

morning had been inevitable, the closing of a vise that had slipped around her when she left the police station the day before. She dressed hurriedly and was out in the garage backing her car into the narrow turnaround when she saw John's Buick pass the drive. Her stomach lurched. Why had he come back? Why hadn't he turned into the driveway as he usually did? There could be only one answer. He had come back for the gun, and he had avoided the driveway because he didn't want to alert her until it was too late. He thought she was still asleep upstairs, and now, with the murderous impulse of his fathers upon him, he was ready to kill.

She had to be sure, she slid out of the car, leaving the door open, and tiptoed the length of the driveway to the front of the house. A stand of forsythia provided cover, and she stood in its shelter and watched her husband approach the door, walking on the lawn instead of the flagstones and inserting the key in the lock with terrible stealth.

The den window was only a few steps away, and she moved back to it in time to see him come into the room and go to the desk. The top lefthand drawer! She felt a whimper rise in her throat as if the gun were already pointed at her. She watched him pick it up, then cock his head as if he were listening for her.

At that moment she felt that

there was no stopping him. The curse of the Cranes, whatever it was, carried her destiny with it and would end with her death — unless, of course, John escaped detection and later found another wife to take her place. The thought of a new wife, of John pretending grief for a while and then resuming his safe, dull, murderous life with someone new, melted her frozen stance. She began to run down the driveway, forgetting the need for silence in her haste to get to the car. The open door welcomed her; she swung it shut and turned on the ignition. The engine roared and died. She stepped on the gas again, knowing she was doing it all wrong, that she risked flooding, but this time the engine held. She had already started down the drive when John appeared around the forsythia, the gun in his hand.

She pressed her foot down hard, and the car leaped forward. For a moment all she could see was her husband's face, its broad, familiar lines twisted into a while mask of dis-belief. Then there was a thud, and he was gone from sight. She rocketed into the road and across it, coming to a stop against an oak on the other side.

EVERYONE WAS VERY KIND to her in the hospital. Dr. Gibbons sent a psychologist to help her "deal with the situation," and he was a very nice person who told her repeatedly that she wasn't

the first person accidentally to kill a loved one. There was, he kept reminding her, no way she could have expected John to be where he was. He had come home for his gun — the manager of the store had explained all about that — and obviously he hadn't wanted Carolyn to hear him. He had hoped she was still in bed, and when he heard her car starting, he had come around the side of the house to investigate, with disastrous consequences.

The store manager had come to see her and offer condolences on behalf of the other employees. He assured her that he would look after things until she was ready to make some decisions. That would include working with the police to arrest the hoodlums who had been demanding protection money for months. John had taken a defiant stand, even to buying the gun, but the manager strongly disapproved of trying to handle the situation without the help of the police. The morning of the accident — he cleared his throat unhappily — the morning of the accident, John had found the big front window of the store shattered and had gone home to get the gun he had purchased some time before. As if he could stop those roughnecks singlehanded! It was like John, the manager said, to try to handle it alone, not even letting his wife know how worried he was. But it was a mistake. See what it had led to.

Carolyn listened, and accepted the condolences of friends, and gave instructions for the funeral she was still too weak to attend. It was as if she were living two entirely separated lives now, one as the bereaved wife of John Crane and the other as his killer. Even when Detective Tomaszek called her later, at home, to offer his sympathy and an additional fact for her story about Gregory Crane, she responded as if she had no real involvement in what he was saying. He had checked with Columbus, he told her, and had learned that two years after Gregory died the police had found the decomposed body of an adolescent male who might — just might — have been Gregory's missing son John. No one would ever be sure, he said, and it seemed to Carolyn that he waited expectantly for some kind of reaction from her and was disappointed when she thanked him calmly for calling.

So John might have died for nothing. Terrible. Terrible. There was no getting at the truth. And the other Carolyn, the killer, moved coolly through her days, dreaming, making plans. What was done was done, and *I'll never be bored again*, she thought a dozen — fifty — times a day. That seemed the most important thing, now that she was able to think clearly, and she wondered where she had found the strength and the courage to take action. ●

High Bid

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It was a simple business deal. He would kill the man's wife for a five thousand dollar fee. If only she weren't so damned pretty ...

"I WANT YOU to kill my wife," the stout man said, coming right to the point.

Granger was not surprised. Very little surprised him any more. "Who sent you to me?"

"Never mind that. I heard you could help. Can you or can't you?" The skin of his face was a pasty white, and his stomach seemed about to burst from his shirt. Granger had seen the type before, late at night in any bar.

"I'm a private detective, Mr. Frank," he replied with a pretense

of dignity.

The large man brushed aside the words. "You lost your license in this state three years ago. After that you were arrested and charged with blackmail, but the jury let you off."

Granger frowned at the words. "You think you know a lot about me, don't you?"

"I never hire a man without checking him out. Especially not to commit murder."

"Let me tell you something, Mr. Frank," Granger said quietly,

leaning forward in his chair and jabbing a finger at the large man's stomach. "You don't hire me to commit murder! You don't come into my office and say a thing like that out loud! You don't even think it — understand?"

"All right," Frank said, a bit uneasily. "Calm down. I'll play the game your way."

Granger picked up his pencil. "Fine. Now then — you want me to investigate your wife. Correct?"

"Correct."

"Do you live together?"

"No. She's at the Crown Hotel, room 325. She left me about two months ago, but she refuses to grant a divorce until I make an utterly fantastic property settlement. I think the woman is insane."

"And you want me to speak to her? Persuade her?"

"We're not children, Granger. You know what I want you to do. I have a thousand dollars here to start with. When the job is done there'll be four thousand more for you."

Granger reached out a hand toward the pile of wrinkled twenty-dollar bills. "I'll take your money and see what I can do. But I promise nothing — understand?"

Thomas Frank nodded. "I understand."

"What's your wife's full name?"

"Shirley Frank, age 33, blonde, good figure, fairly intelligent.

Sexy, I guess you'd call her."

"Why'd you ever leave her?"

"I told you — she left me, two months ago."

Granger closed his eyes for a moment, thinking about all the love affairs — all the marriages — that went bad every day. He thought about his own marriage, and the bitterness of the memory soured the taste in his mouth.

"All right," he said simply.

"Where can I reach you?"

"Don't try. I'll contact you."

Granger fingered the money. "I understand."

He sat there for a long time after Thomas Frank left, listening to the sounds of traffic in the street below.

Granger had two things to do that night. First he contacted the little mouse-faced man who'd steered Frank to his office. Otto would never win any beauty contests, not even in the police lineup, but it was his ugly facade that made him the perfect pawn in Granger's chessboard scheme of things. Huddled with the little man in the back booth of a dingy neighborhood bar, he was the master of his destiny once again.

"A fat man with a pasty face," Granger said. "He paid me five hundred dollars." He always halved the amounts when talking to Otto, because little men were often greedy.

"I remember him, Granger. He was around yesterday. He asked questions about you."

"I wish you hadn't told him about the blackmail bit."

Otto shifted nervously. "Jeez, Granger, I didn't tell him that! It must have been one of the bartenders."

"No matter." Granger peeled off five twenties from his roll and passed them to the man. "Here's your cut for steering him my way. There may be more."

"He wants his wife taken care of, huh?"

"What he wants and what he's going to get are two different things. But before I tighten the screws I think I'll call on Mrs. Frank. This might turn into a double header, if they hate each other enough."

He left Otto in the back booth and drove through the settling darkness to his second destination, the Crown Hotel. There was an ugly April dampness in the air that made him hate the city. Maybe next year he could go to Florida for a month in the spring. Maybe next year he could do a lot of things.

Shirley Frank was in her room, but she wasn't seeing anybody. Granger sighed into the telephone and said, "I have a message from your husband."

"He knows what he can do with his messages."

"Couldn't I see you for just a minute?"

"No."

"Would you come down, then? For a cocktail?"

"It's eight o'clock at night! What kind of a drinker are you to have cocktails this late?"

"Come down and see. Really, it's quite important."

She came, finally, after keeping him waiting for twenty minutes. He guessed she was the sort who always kept men waiting. Frank had said she was 33, but by the candlelight of the hotel lounge she would have passed for 25. She was indeed sexy, as her husband had said. "You wanted to see me?" she said, as if addressing a door-to-door salesman.

"Can we talk here?"

"Any message my husband sent me ..."

"He didn't exactly send one," Granger admitted, choosing his words carefully. "But it's still a message I thought you'd want to hear. I've been offered five thousand dollars to remove you."

"Remove?" Suddenly his meaning was clear, and she started to rise, the color draining from her face.

"Hold it! Just sit down! I'm not going to hurt you."

"You'll kill me painlessly, I suppose." Her voice was breaking, but she sat down again.

"Listen, Mr. Granger or whatever your name is — I'll give you just one minute to get out of here and out of my life forever! If I ever see you again, I'm calling the police."

"If you go to the police I'll simply deny everything," he said.

"On the other hand, consider this possibility — if something happens to your husband while you're still married to him, I assume you'd come in for some money."

"Something? What?"

He shrugged and said nothing. She was very beautiful, and just then he could almost see the wheels turning behind those frosty blue eyes.

"I think you'd better leave," she said quietly.

"Just consider it," he told her, getting to his feet. "Two can play the game, you know. The next guy he approaches might not be as willing to protect you as I am."

"And what do you get out of it?"

"A little money, nothing more. You're too beautiful to end up dead."

"Everybody ends up dead."

"But not as young as you." He turned and left her sitting there, stopping to pay the waiter on the way out.

After a night of sleeping on it, he was pretty certain she'd be ready to make a deal. And that was all he wanted — a few thousand from each of them, nobody hurt. Once they'd paid him, neither one could go to the police without admitting their part in a murder plot. It had worked for Granger before and it would work again, because he knew that people basically were no damned

good. He made his living knowing it.

THE FOLLOWING AFTERNOON he phoned Shirley Frank at her hotel. "This is Granger again. I was wondering if you'd changed your mind."

"I don't want to talk to you," she said. "Stop calling me!"

The phone clicked in his ear and he hung up too. All right, she'd come around in time. He killed an hour having a few drinks with Otto and then called Thomas Frank at the number listed in the phone book.

"This is Granger. I have to see you."

"Who?"

"Granger. From yesterday. I need a bit more money."

"You must have the wrong person."

"Cut the fooling around. I know I wasn't supposed to call, but it's important."

"I don't know you. Goodbye."

For the second time that afternoon the phone clicked in Granger's ear. He sat in the cramped metal booth stacking dimes and thinking. After a while he went out to his car and drove to Thomas Frank's house. It was a rich man's rambling retreat, nestled among high old pines. The ugly dampness of the previous evening had given way to a balmy calm, and he no longer needed to think about Florida. This was the climate for him, where the easy

money was. Rich man's money.

He pushed the buzzer and waited. After a moment Thomas Frank opened the door. "I thought I'd better come see you," Granger said.

"Damn it — what was the idea of phoning me? Haven't you ever heard of wiretaps?"

"I ..."

Frank didn't wait for more. He slammed the door in Granger's face.

Granger went back to his musty little office in the wrong section of town and brooded about the day's events. They'd both rejected him, when he thought he could get them bidding against one another. He remembered the nine hundred dollars still in his pocket and wondered if he should settle for that much after all. No — there was bigger money to be had, if only he made the right move.

He waited till after dinner and then phoned the bar where he knew Otto would be. "Come up to the office," he told the little man. "It's important."

"What if somebody sees me?"

"Who cares? Plenty of people see us drinking together."

"All right, Granger. I'll be up."

He didn't have long to wait. Otto could move fast when he wanted to, and ten minutes later he was tapping on the glass of the office door. "Is it still the husband business?" Otto asked.

Granger nodded. "Here's Thomas Frank's address. I want

you to go out there and keep an eye on him for me."

Otto nodded in understanding. "I'll follow him and let you know what he does. Just like the old days, huh?"

"Like the old days, Otto."

The little man went off on his mission, clutching the twenty-dollar bill Granger gave him. Otto, at least, was like the old days, even if nothing else was. Simple, greedy, but faithful.

Granger looked at his watch and wondered if he should try another call to Shirley Frank. He decided to chance it and dialed the number of her hotel. They rang her room but nobody answered. She was out somewhere, out prowling the night somewhere.

In the morning he found her waiting by his office door. She was leaning against the wall, smoking a cigarette and managing a sort of post-midnight seductiveness that seemed not a bit out of place at nine a.m. "Come in," he said. "I've been trying to reach you."

"This is your office?" she asked distastefully.

"Sometimes it affects me the same way."

She picked the only good chair and sat down. "Are you a private detective?"

"I used to be. If you look closely at the door you can see where I scraped the gold lettering off."

"So now you just hire yourself out for killings?"

"Hardly. But I am willing to

protect you from your husband. For a fee, of course."

She lit another cigarette and crossed her legs, showing nyloned knees that were meant to be shown. "You may get a chance to," she replied. "I've been thinking it over."

Granger leaned back in his chair. "I have a man watching him now. I'm looking after your interests already."

"Does he really mean to kill me?"

"He hired me to do the job." He decided the time was ripe. "How much is it worth to be rid of him forever?"

"You're really a bastard, aren't you?"

"I'm a businessman."

"You mean you'd kill him for me? *Murder* him?"

"I don't use such words."

"I'll bet you don't." Then, almost in the same breath, she hurried on. "I'll pay you six thousand, but not until his affairs are settled. I don't have the cash now."

He hadn't figured on that. "Can't you borrow it?"

"From the bank? Hardly!"

"These things aren't done on credit. I need at least part of it in advance. How much could you raise?"

"If I had cash do you think I'd be living at the Crown Hotel? I'm used to better things."

"You must have jewelry, something!"

"I have the car. I could get two thousand for that."

"Then get it!"

"Wouldn't the police think it suspicious later on? Wouldn't they wonder what I did with the money?"

"You gave it to me to protect you from your husband. Let me worry about it from there."

"They'll suspect you of murder."

"You're paying me to take that risk." But he knew there would be no risk because there would be no murder. Under the circumstances he could afford to settle for a couple of thousand dollars.

"All right," she said finally. "I'll have some money for you tomorrow."

"Good." As he showed her to the door, he added a question. "Just for my own information, why'd you leave him?"

"Why? Did you get a look at the stomach on him? And that face? I'm still too young to be trapped for the rest of my life. Even his money couldn't keep me there."

"You hurt his pride."

"I guess so. I guess that's why he wants me dead."

He watched her walk down the hall to the elevator. She didn't look like a woman who'd just been arranging the murder of her husband.

THE DAY DRAGGED after that. He wondered why he didn't hear

from Otto, wondered if it was going to rain some more, wondered what the hell he was doing in this kind of life. By the harsh light of the afternoon sun the office seemed almost like a tomb, and he was pleased when the clouds came again to obscure the starkness of truth. He didn't like to think about his life any more. He'd tried to stop thinking about it the day his wife walked out on him. There'd been other women since, some of them better, but the pain was still there. He hadn't really cared about things after that. His license was gone, and the paint was chipping from the walls, and the only thing still important was an easy way to make a buck.

Presently it turned dark, even as the threat of rain passed once more and the sky began to clear. It was a crazy April. He'd be glad when it was over in two more days.

He hadn't eaten all day, so he went out for food. Halfway up the block he spotted a parked car and recognized it as Otto's battered convertible. He went over and pulled open the door. "Otto? What's wrong?"

The little man turned toward him. "Hi, Granger."

"What are you doing here in the dark? Why didn't you call me, or come up?"

"I'm hurt, Granger."

"What?" At first he didn't understand.

"I'm hurt here." Otto lifted

the arm he'd kept tight against his side and Granger saw the glistening dampness of fresh blood.

"What happened, Otto? Who did it to you?"

"I ... tried to shake him down. When I saw he had a gun I started running, but he winged me. God, it hurts! Help me, Granger."

"Frank shot you?"

Otto nodded. "About an hour ago, I guess. I didn't know where to go."

"I'll get you to a hospital."

"I asked for money and he pulled a gun. I was running when he shot me. I didn't figure on a gun." The effort of the words was too much for him. He slumped down in the seat and suddenly blood welled from his mouth.

"Otto!"

But there was nothing more to be done for the mouse-faced little man. Granger wiped the sweat from his forehead and checked his clothing for blood-stains. Then he slid carefully out of the car, hoping he'd left no fingerprints, and walked on down the street.

Casual, keep it casual. And don't look back.

Never look back.

They'd taken away his pistol permit when he lost his private investigator's license, but he still kept a little Walther automatic in his apartment. Now, checking the action and loading the magazine with eight rounds of .32

caliber ammunition, he wondered if he'd have to use it. He'd never killed a man, not even in Korea, but he knew it wouldn't bother him. Otto was dead and something had to be done about that.

He drove back to Thomas Frank's house, parking a few doors away and approaching the place on foot. Down the street somewhere a dog was barking. He pushed the door buzzer, hoping Frank was alone. The man came after a moment, blinking into the darkness. "Yes?"

Granger put a heavy palm on his chest and pushed. "Inside!"

"Get out or I'll call the police!"

"I don't think so, Frank. I could tell them too much about you. I could tell them you murdered Otto and wanted to kill Shirley."

"That ugly little man? If he died he deserved it!"

Granger slapped him across the face. "cut the talk. I want ten thousand bucks in cash, or the police get you."

"You must be insane!"

"Look, the police will find Otto's body in another hour or so, if they haven't found it already. Either you pay up or you rot in prison."

Frank turned away. "All right," he said at last. "I have some money in my desk."

Granger followed him into a book-lined study. He expected Frank to go for the gun, as he'd done with Otto, and he wasn't disappointed. Frank's hand came

out of the drawer holding a .38 revolver.

The man was slow. Scared and slow. Granger knocked the gun aside and doubled him over with a fist to the stomach. He took out his own gun but then he put it away and used his fists instead. When he was finished he went through the desk but there was no money. He bent over the bloodied man and lifted his head from the carpet. "Where's the money, Frank?"

"Don't ... " the man blubbered. "Don't hit me!"

Granger let his head drop and stood up. "I'm taking this gun, Frank — the one you used to kill Otto. Now the price is twenty thousand, and I want it by tomorrow."

Outside, the dog was still barking. Granger walked to his car and drove home.

He opened a can of beer and turned on the television set for the eleven o'clock news. There was a brief bulletin about finding Otto's body, but the police hadn't identified him yet. Granger figured it would be morning before they got a line on his identity and started looking for his friends.

The telephone rang and he answered it, wondering if the police had gotten onto him already. But it wasn't the police — it was Shirley Frank. "Granger?" Her voice sounded tense.

"Yes, Shirley. What is it?"

"Thomas just phoned and said you'd been there. He said you beat him up and demanded money. He sounded wild — said he was going to kill me because I put you up to it."

"All right," Granger told her. "Can you come over here? You've got my address; it's apartment 4-B."

"I'll be over."

He drank his beer slowly and sat down to wait for her. Ten minutes later the buzzer sounded and he went to open the door, surprised that she'd made such good time.

It wasn't Shirley. It was Thomas Frank, and he had a gun. "Inside, mister, or I'll kill you right here."

Granger backed up slowly, raising his hands. The fat man's face was purple and swollen from the beating, but it hadn't scared him off. Granger began to wish he'd used his gun. "Did you bring my money?" he asked.

"Never mind money." The gun came up in Frank's hand, and he might have squeezed the trigger if the door buzzer hadn't sounded again.

"That'll be your wife," Granger said. "Here's your chance to do the job yourself. You've had practice now, with Otto."

"Open the door."

When she saw Frank her face went pale and he thought she might run. Frank reached past Granger and jerked her into the room, kicking the door shut.

"What are you doing here?" she asked him.

"I came to settle a score. I've got both of you together and I can finish this right now. Maybe the police can even be made to think it was a double suicide."

"Do you really want that?" Granger argued. "Why kill me when you can buy me off?"

Frank thought about it. Finally he said, "All right. Help me with her and you still get your five grand. But no more!"

"Tom!" she screamed, seeing death in his eyes. "Tom, don't do it!"

"It's too late for tears, Shirley. A couple of years too late." He swung the gun around until it was pointed at her stomach. "What do you say, Granger?"

"I'm in," Granger said, and took a step closer. The edge of his hand slammed down on Frank's wrist, sending the weapon spinning.

"You damn fool!" the fat man yelled. "What's the ... ?"

In that instant Shirley Frank was faster than either of them. She scooped up the fallen gun and fired three quick shots almost without aiming. The bullets slammed Thomas Frank against the wall, and he died on his feet, sliding gradually to the floor.

"That was smart!" Granger exploded. "Now we're both in for it!"

She stood there looking at the body, her expression unchanged.

"What do we do now, Granger?" she asked.

There was a murmur in the hallway and he knew the police would be called soon. Better that he should phone them himself. He walked to the telephone and dialed the familiar number. "Give me the gun," he told her.

"What for?"

"Just give it to me." Then, into the telephone, "This is Granger, out at the Riverview Apartments. Number 4-B. I've just killed a man." Then he hung up.

"Why did you do that?" she asked.

He thought about Otto, and about the paint peeling on his office walls. He thought about a wedding a long time back, to a

girl not half as pretty as Shirley Frank. He stepped around the body and went into the kitchen for another beer. "Maybe I can make it self-defense," he told her. "Maybe you'll wait around for me."

"I won't wait for anything," she said. "I'll be on a plane to California the first chance I get."

"I suppose so."

She hesitated and then asked. "Do you need money?"

"I could use some. How about that six thousand?"

"Six ... ?"

"For killing your husband. That was the high bid, wasn't it?"

Then he sat down to wait for the police.

(Continued from page 4)

No information was available at presstime on JACK PETREE and BETTY REN WRIGHT, but they're okay in my book. For now, we'll let their stories speak for them.

And speaking of puzzles, we've got another quiz for you mystery movie buffs in this issue. Preliminary readers' letters indicate you like this feature.

And speaking of letters, we've even managed to squeeze in a short but sincere letter column.

And speaking of being sincere, there's the question of reprints; more specifically, should we or should we not use them? MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE so far has run only brand new, hot-off-the-typewriter stories. But we've come across stories which have appeared *only* in Europe, and stories which have appeared *only* in anthologies, and stories which have appeared *only* in magazines not in the mystery field — and chances are you've never seen these, which is a shame because many of them are really good. Should we use these or not? Let us know.

Until next month.

—CEF

MURDER MOVIES QUIZ

Your assignment (should you care to accept it): match the movie titles with the clues given. The solution is upside down at the end of the quiz.

TITLES

1. MURDER AT 45 R.P.M (1960-French, dubbed)
2. MURDER AT THE VANITIES (1934)
3. MURDER BY CONTRACT (1958)
4. MURDER, HE SAYS (1945)
5. MURDER IN THE AIR (1940)
6. MURDER IN THE MUSIC HALL (1946)
7. MURDER, INC. (1960)
8. MURDER IS MY BEAT (1955)
9. MURDER IS MY BUSINESS (1946)
10. THE MURDER MAN (1935)
11. MURDER MY SWEET (1944)
12. MURDER ON APPROVAL (1956-British)
13. MURDER OVER NEW YORK (1940)
14. MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE (1932)

CLUES

- A. Ronald Reagan is a secret agent assigned to stop enemy agents from stealing secret plans.
- B. A Mike Shayne caper with Hugh Beaumont as the shamus.
- C. A female singer's husband seemingly returns from the grave to haunt her.
- D. Stuart Whitman and Peter Falk roar through this gangster saga.
- E. Dick Powell as Philip Marlowe in an adaptation of a Chandler novel.
- F. A Charlie Chan adventure starring Sidney Toler.
- G. Jack Oakie's the detective in this backstage Broadway show mystery.
- H. Reporter Spencer Tracy convinces police someone else is guilty of the murder he committed.
- I. Falsely accused Barbara Payton discovers the real killer.
- J. Insurance salesman Fred MacMurray encounters Marjorie Main's family of hillbilly murderers.
- K. Tom Conway looks for treasure.
- L. In this Poe story, Bela Lugosi searches for a bride for his pet ape.
- M. Backstage whodunit from Republic Pictures, featuring Vera Hrubá Ralston, William Gargan, and Ann Rutherford.
- N. Vince Edwards is a professional killer who muffs his assignment and becomes a gangland target.

THE SOLUTION

I-C 2-G 3-N 4-J 5-A 6-M 7-D 8-I 9-B 10-H
11-E 12-K 13-F 14-L

The Alphabet Murders

by JACK RITCHIE

The first victim had the letter A lipsticked across his forehead. The second one had the letter B. The murderer had a perfectly good series going for him. Why did he also resort to nursery rimes in the killing of his victims?

THE FIRST BODY was that of a derelict.

We studied the deceased in the light of our flashlights.

Ralph said, "I wonder why he's got that capital letter, A on his forehead in lipstick."

I straightened up. "We must not so readily assume that it is the letter A, Ralph. It could also be the crude representation of an arrow-head."

He looked again. "Why arrow-head?"

"Ralph, observe the raven-black hair of the victim. The ebony eyes. The general dark cast of features. That Amerind dignity even in death. Would that not suggest to you Menominee,

or possibly Potawatomi?"

I turned to one of the uniformed officers who had preceded our arrival. "Has the victim been identified?"

He nodded. "According to his wallet and the people around here who knew him, he was Casimir Kaminski Wisniewski."

"Well, I said, putting the past behind, "does anyone have an explanation for the capital letter A stenciled upon this unfortunate man's forehead?"

No one had.

The victim had died in a sitting position in the recess of a doorway. An empty pint whisky bottle in a paper bag lay beside him.

One of the night men from the

coroner's office said, "Just one blow. And from the looks of the groove in his skull, I'd say it was caused by something like a narrow iron bar."

The weapon which had dispatched Wisniewski had not been found.

The uniformed officer had more information. "According to the barkeep next door, Wisniewski came into his place at about eight this evening and bought a pint of whiskey. Then he left. Wisniewski wasn't much of a social drinker. He liked to go off and drink the bottle all by himself. He didn't go far. Just around the corner to this doorway. I guess he sat down, made himself comfortable, and finished the bottle. He might have been asleep when he was killed. His body was still warm when we got here."

It was now nearly nine P.M.

Ralph and I began our questioning in the tavern where Wisniewski had purchased his whiskey. We learned that he had been in his forties and had no regular job. He occasionally picked up a little money by distributing advertising circulars or swamping in the neighborhood saloons. But mostly, it seemed, he preferred to prowl the nearby downtown section and panhandle. As far as anyone knew, he had no permanent address. Apparently in cold weather he rented a bed for the night in one of the area flop houses and in clement, he slept where-

ever the mood struck him and he would not be stepped or rained upon.

At nine-thirty, an officer found Ralph and me questioning some of Wisniewski's acquaintances and informed us that Chief Parkington would like to speak to us.

We went out to the radio in the squad car at the curb.

"Henry," the captain said, "How are you doing out there?"

"I predict that we will have the culprit or culpritess in custody within twenty-four hours."

"Good for you, Henry, but right now you might just be looking in the wrong place. I heard that your body's got the letter *A* painted on his forehead with lipstick?"

"We are reasonably certain that it is the latter *A*."

"Well, Henry, we just found another dead body. This time in the industrial valley. He was clobbered over the head too, but this one's got the letter *B* up there on his forehead."

Our industrial valley is the depression lining both sides of the river which divides the city into north and south. The traffic between the two halves flows over a series of viaducts.

Under the viaducts lies a region which has lost most of its factories and industries to the space and tax breaks of the countryside industrial parks. The plants remaining are obviously tired and near to expiring. They are randomly connected by short streets of

grimy frame houses erected in the days when the hands walked to work and their days were governed by factory whistles and church bells. Most of the young and hopeful have long since migrated and one seldom saw children here anymore.

When we reached our destination, Ralph and I parked behind the assembled squad cars. A circle of silent slouching adults hovered at the entrance to an alley where the body had been found.

Ralph and I verified that the victim did indeed have the letter *B* upon his forehead and we also noted that he still clutched a red bandana-type handkerchief in his right hand, and that a quarter lay only a few inches from his left hand.

"Ah, yes," I said, reading the signs. "Just as he was passing the entrance to this alley, he felt a sneeze coming on or experienced the need to blow his nose. However along with his handkerchief, he also inadvertently pulled a quarter out of his pocket. It dropped to the sidewalk, and just as he stooped to pick it up, he was struck down."

The again-met night man from the coroner's office had much the same news. "He was hit just once, but that was enough. Same sort of weapon too, I'd guess."

Whatever that weapon had been, it had not been found.

Ralph and I began our questioning in the adjacent building,

Casey's Tavern. We learned that the victim was a James Leonardi, sixty-seven, single, and he had boarded in a house several buildings down the street. He had put in over fifty years in the local glove factory, but was now retired and drew social security.

Since his retirement, it had become his habit to wander over to Casey's Tavern in the evenings. He would nurse his beers, watch television, and talk. He would usually leave at about nine-thirty.

His body had been discovered by an elderly couple who had left the tavern only a few minutes after Leonardi. It appeared that the killer had lurked in the darkness of the alley and struck when Leonardi passed.

We learned that Leonardi's personality was of such a neutral nature that everyone agreed that he couldn't have had an enemy in the world. The keeper of his boarding house provided us with the information that during his working days, Leonardi had not been one of the saving kind, and so that today all that his three nephews — all now living in West Allis — could look forward to was sharing a five thousand dollar life insurance policy.

At a quarter to midnight, Ralph and I cut short our questioning and returned to headquarters to check out. I drove on to my apartment, consumed a sandwich and a large glass of Ovaltine and then went to bed.

"My phone rang at 8:45 the next morning and it was Captain Norwich, the day commander. "Henry, they tell me that last night you and Ralph got two corpses with the start of the alphabet on their foreheads?"

I nodded into the mouthpiece. "Correct, Captain. We are investigating the possibility of a connection between the two."

"Well, Henry, we got ourselves one more corpse. A man named Cornelius Van Leuggen. He was found dead in his study this morning with the letter C on his forehead. I want you and Ralph to go over there now and take charge of the investigation. You'll get overtime."

Ralph and I met at headquarters, checked out a car, and drove on to Lake Shore Drive, turning between the brick gateposts of the Van Leuggen home at a little past 9:30. We parked in the oval driveway before the house.

A uniformed officer led us down the hallway and into a cathedral-ceilinged study. A glance at the bookshelves revealed not a single paper book jacket. Leather was clearly in charge.

The coroner had found the Van Leuggen address sufficiently interesting to answer the call himself. "He was hit over the head three or four times. With what, I don't know. They tell me nobody's come up with a weapon yet."

We found Sergeants Handson and Whipperly in attendance and they had been informed by Captain Norwich that Ralph and I were to be given cooperation and cheerful deference.

"Who found the body?" I asked.

A tall, bald man stepped from the background. "I did, sir."

I regarded him keenly. "And who are you?"

"Winterset. The butler. Though actually no one really hires anyone just to butle anymore. I have other duties."

"What time did you find the body?"

"A bit before eight this morning, sir. When I opened the door to the study."

"Ah," I said, "The study door was closed? And you opened it? Why?"

"The general operation of this household is my province and during the course of my inspections I often find it necessary to open doors."

"After you found the body, did you touch anything?"

"Nothing at all, sir. It was obvious that Mr. Van Leuggen was beyond help. I simply re-closed the door, informed the family of his death, and then called the police."

"Was Mr. Van Leuggen a creature of habit? Did he, for instance, go to bed at the same time every night?"

"Yes, sir. He usually retired to his rooms before eleven."

"Good," I said, "Good." I rubbed my hands. "Ralph, this is my kind of a precise case. We are able to accurately approximate the time victim A died, since his body was still warmish when found. And we know that victim B met his death slightly after nine-thirty. And so, given time for the journey from the industrial valley to this address, I would say, with a high degree of confidence, that Van Leuggen was murdered between ten and eleven last evening."

Ralph looked at the coroner.

The coroner shrugged. "Why not? What I mean is that the longer a body is dead, the more you got to guess about the time of death."

Ralph nodded. "So couldn't Van Leuggen have gone to bed at eleven, like usual, but later heard a noise down here? Say like one A.M.? And he came down to investigate?"

"Ralph, Ralph," I said patiently. "Surely you saw that the corpse was fully clothed. This would indicate that he was killed *before* his regular time for retiring. Had he heard this speculative noise at one A.M., he would have been in his pajamas and probably also his bathrobe."

Ralph didn't want to let go. "Henry, a lot of people these days don't think it's necessary to own a bathrobe. Or wear pajamas. So he heard the noise, got dressed,

and came down to investigate."

I chuckled. "Ralph if you heard a suspicious noise downstairs and were sans bathrobe and pajamas, you might possibly slip into some clothing, but would you pause before a mirror to put on a superfluous necktie? And our corpse was wearing a perfectly obvious necktie."

Ralph was a gracious loser. "That was damn good thinking, Henry." Then he frowned and proceeded to move about the room, looking under lamp shades.

"The lights," he finally said. "Why aren't the lights on? The desk lamp? Or at least one of the others?"

"Ralph, why should the lamps be on? It's daylight."

"But it wasn't daylight last night, Henry. I don't think the victim was sitting there at his desk in the dark. And the murderer had to see what he was doing. So the lights should still be on, but they aren't. And the butler here says that he touched nothing."

I pondered. "Ralph, the victim could have just entered the study and been groping his way toward his desk lamp. But before he could turn it on, the murderer struck him down."

"Henry, in the *dark* the murderer struck *three* times? And got his target everytime?"

That was a bit difficult, but I came up with the obvious answer. "What guarantee do we have that the murderer struck only three

times? There might have been twenty blows, seventeen of which were misses."

"But, Henry, would all of those misses be *clean* misses? Wouldn't at least some of them have struck Van Leuggen's shoulders, or his arms, or whatever? But all of the wounds are on one small head."

"Ralph, it might not have been *absolutely* dark in here last night. Perhaps there was moonlight streaming through those perfectly good French windows?" I appealed to the occupants of the room. "Does anyone remember if there was a full moon last night? Or at least gibbous?"

Sergeants Hanson and Whipperly had been listening to our deductive dialogue with obvious awe and Whipperly now dared to speak. "Maybe the murderer turned off the lights before he left."

Winterset interposed. "When I said that I touched nothing, I simply meant that I did not touch the body or its immediate environs. However, through force of habit and unconscious deference to the energy crunch — or possibly because I was in a state of shock — I might unthinkingly have gone about turning off lights."

I turned to Ralph. "You see, Ralph, there is a perfectly rational explanation for everything. There was no need for panic."

I re-directed to Winterset. "You mentioned that you informed the family of Mr. Van Leuggen's

death. Just who is this family?"

"Mr. Van Leuggen's two nephews and a niece. They are domiciled in this house, sir." He indicated two young men and a young woman quietly seated on a divan at the far end of the room staring at us.

I approached them. "I am Detective-Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle."

Ariadne Van Leuggen was a raven-haired girl in her mid-twenties with violet eyes behind owl's-eye shell glasses. The nephews seemed a few years older. Roscoe Van Leuggen wore a basically green plaid jacket, and Sigmund a solid blue. And that seemed to be their only point of difference.

Roscoe folded his plaid-sleeved arms over his chest and smiled. "Sigmund and I are twins."

I took Ralph aside. "I don't like this one bit."

"What don't you like one bit?"

"This twins business. Whenever there are twins, there's always hanky-panky. Switched identities and that sort of thing. If one of them gets killed, you never know which one it is."

I returned to Van Leuggen's survivors. "From the cut of your uncle's clothes, I would guess that he was a wealthy man?"

Adriadne agreed. "Millions."

"Ah," I said disarmingly, "And who stands to inherit these millions?"

"We three do," Adriadne said. Sigmund smiled and now folded his blue-clad arms over his chest. "Not me. I'm disinherited."

Adriadne regarded him. "What for this time?"

"I had a fender-bender in Uncle's favorite Cadillac."

Ariadne quite correctly thought it necessary to explain. "I've been disinherited at least a half a dozen times and Sigmund and Roscoe at least twice that each. Uncle just loved to disinherit us. Said it kept us on our toes. At any given time, he just wasn't happy unless one of us was out of his will."

I addressed Sigmund. "You have been disinherited from millions, and yet you sit there with a smile on your face? Is there an explanation?"

He nodded happily. "Don't you see? That leaves me with no motive for killing Uncle Cornelius. But both Ariadne and Roscoe still have beauties."

Winterset had been staring at the ceiling and now decided to remind me of something. "I couldn't help but notice that there was the letter C, in lipstick, on Mr. Van Leuggen's forehead."

I studied him keenly. "What makes you so certain that it is the letter C? Why couldn't it be a representation of a new moon? Or possibly a handleless sickle?"

Winterset persisted. "I read in this morning's newspaper that two people were murdered last night. One was found with the letter A

upon his forehead, and the other with the letter B. And when I saw that tracing on Mr. Van Leuggen's forehead, I just assumed that it might be a C."

Ralph had been thinking. Now he spoke. "Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief. Doctor, lawyer, Indian chief."

Naturally we all looked at him.

He colored a bit. "We've got Van Leuggen, who was certainly rich. And then there was Wisiniewski, who was a panhandler. In other words, a beggar. And then there is Leonardi, who's on social security, and that's poor. So there it is. Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief."

"What are you getting at, Ralph?" I asked, though suspecting.

"Henry, the murderer's next victim is going to be a thief."

I took Ralph out of earshot. "Doesn't it strike you that there is a certain redundancy involved here?"

"What redundancy?"

"Ralph, here our murderer has a perfectly good series going. A, B, C, D, E, F, and so on. Why must he also resort to rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief?"

"Maybe he just wants to flesh it out, Henry. Give it some class."

"No, Ralph. And besides, the sequence of your little nursery rhyme is rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief. It is not beggar man, poor man, rich man, etcetera."

Ralph was disappointed. "You mean that the next victim won't be a thief?"

I began thinking inexorably. "Ralph, we have assumed that the three murders were identical, and yet there are significant differences."

"What significant differences?"

"Murders *A* and *B* were committed in relatively public places, i.e. the entrance to an alley and in a doorway. And in each case, just *one* blow was struck. And further, the time of death of each of the first two victims could be almost exactly determined. However was any of this true of the victim hereinafter identified as victim *C*?"

"I'm listening with an open mind, Henry."

"To commit the murder of victim *C*, the murderer had to invade the sanctity of private property. He had to kill his victim in the full glare of artificial light. And also, he struck not *one*, but *three* blows. Would this not suggest passion rather than cold-blooded murder?"

Ralph mulled the possibility. "Somebody in the house, besides the butler, read the morning papers and decided it might be the right time to get rid of Uncle Cornelius and put the blame on the alphabet murderer?"

"No, Ralph. Cornelius Van Leuggen was absolutely stone-cold dead when his body was

found, which indicates that he was killed long before the morning newspaper hit the breakfast table. Though we cannot fasten on the exact time of his demise just yet. We just assumed that he met his death between ten and eleven."

"We assumed?"

I chortled. "This all reminds me of *The Purloined Letter*."

"Everything does."

"What better place to hide a murder than among murders? In other words, is it not possible that our killer had one quite legitimate motive for killing one of his victims? The other two were simply thrown in as a cover-up."

Ralph gave that a try. "You mean our murderer killed Wisniewski and then the other two to cover up?"

"No, Ralph. Who would go through all of that elaboration just to cover up the murder of a beggar? No, we must look for the *large* motive. And that usually is money, isn't it? Which brings us to Van Leuggen."

"Victim *C*?"

"Ralph, just because the murderer so thoughtfully labeled his victims *A*, *B*, and *C*, does not necessarily mean that he killed them in that order. Couldn't the sequence have been *BAC*, or *ACB*, or more likely *CAB*?"

Ralph waited to be persuaded.

"Ralph, *all* three victims were killed on the *same* night. Why this unseemly haste? This suggests desperation rather than intelligent

pre-planning, does it not? If you cold-bloodedly decide to hide your murder in a series of murders, wouldn't you space out those murders? Possibly over a week or two? This would allow time for the police and the public to adjust to the idea that a Jack-the-Ripper style killer is on the prowl. But *all* of them were killed in *one* night."

"All right, Henry, what does that suggest?"

"It suggests that victim *C* was killed *first*. In the height of some lethal emotion. And our murderer, realizing that he would most certainly be regarded as a prime suspect, decided that his only hope of getting away with it was to make it *seem* like the death was just one of a series of murders by an irrationally motivated madman. After all, he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. So he scrawled the letter *C* upon his victim's forehead, and then he went out and murdered *A* and *B*.

I had the room emptied of all but official personnel and then directed the fingerprint men to dust the implements beside the fireplace. Especially the poker.

I explained to Ralph. "If *C* was murdered first, and in this room, and in the heat of some passion, is it not likely that the murderer would grab the first weapon handy? And what is more handy in the study of a wealthy home, than a fireplace poker? And remember the nature of the

wounds. All of them could possibly be, and probably were, inflicted by a fireplace poker."

"Henry, do you really expect to find the murderer's fingerprints on the fireplace poker?"

"Of course not, Ralph. Actually I expect to find no fingerprints at all. Which, in itself, should be suspicious, should it not?"

When the fingerprint man finished, he brought us the news. "There are prints on everything, Henry, including the poker. And all of them belong to the victim."

"Well," I said, undaunted.

"Our murderer is cleverer than we suspected. He realized that the police would routinely search for fingerprints and knew that if they found none whatsoever on the poker, it would immediately raise questions and suspicions. Therefore, after returning from murders *A* and *B*, he washed the blood from the poker and then wisely affixed victim *C*'s prints upon the weapon and returned it to the stand. Nevertheless, Ralph, I am convinced that we are indeed looking at the murder weapon."

I brooded for a moment. "Ralph, the murderer must strike again and very likely tonight. The sooner he gets the head and attention off murder *C*, the better for him. And his next victim would probably be a thief.

Ralph closed his eyes for a few seconds. "What converted you?"

"Further consideration and the realization that he certainly heard

you deliver that nursery rime and your speculation about the next victim. I don't think he can resist the temptation. He undoubtedly thinks to himself why not make the next victim a thief? What would it hurt? And then doctor, lawyer, and Indian chief. His only problem is how is he going to find a *bona fide* thief? After all they don't go about with signs around their necks. Therefore we must provide him with a thief."

"And how are we going to do that, Henry?"

"I will have placed in this afternoon's newspaper, an item concerning one Kenelm Digby, a purse snatcher and petty thief. The paragraphs will indicate that once again he has been apprehended, but that, for the moment, he is out on bail. His address will be given and that address shall be my own."

Ralph sighed. "And you expect our murderer to find those paragraphs about Digby? Henry, we got an awfully big newspaper in this city and it has a lot of pages."

I was ahead of him, of course. "Ralph, obviously our murderer cannot resist reading about his own murders. Therefore I will arrange that the Digby item appear in the column next to that story. It is inevitable that his eye will stray slightly and he will exclaim, 'Ah, what have I here? A genuine thief?'"

"So you expect our murderer to

show up at your apartment tonight?"

I nodded. "Ralph, since you and I have conducted most of our significant speculation out of the hearing range of our suspects, our murderer is still under the impression that he can sell the murders as a series, one way or another, or both. He does not suspect that I have already out-witted him."

We returned to our suspects and questioned them further, but learned nothing of significance. All of them had spent the previous evening at home, and anyone of them could have slipped into the study to kill Uncle Cornelius.

When we departed the Van Leuggen estate, Ralph went home to take a nap, and I on to make my arrangements.

We met again at headquarters at 4 P.M. for our regular shift.

Ralph had some questions. "Suppose this murderer of yours doesn't come to your apartment? Suppose he just goes out and murders somebody you're not counting on. Like a chiropractor or a disco dancer?"

"I have taken precautions, Ralph. Sergeants Willard and Dorfmann have been stationed outside the Van Leuggen driveway, each in his own car. This should cover the twins situation, Ralph. Suppose that Roscoe, for instance leaves the house, but on a perfectly innocent journey. If I had but a single car out there, that would leave Sigmund free to roam

and ravage. No, Ralph, if both twins leave the house tonight and go in opposite directions, they shall be followed, wherever they go."

Ralph smiled. "Are you sure two cars are enough, Henry. Why not three?"

I cleared my throat. "I have considered that objectively, Ralph, and come to the conclusion that our third suspect is really too physically slight to be our murderer."

"Henry, nowadays small and frail young women use two hands to swing their tennis rackets. If the can swing rackets, they can swing pokers."

"But, Ralph, she simply isn't tall enough. All of the victims were struck on the top of the head. This would suggest a certain positive height on the part of the murderer to accomodate the overhead nature of the swing."

"Henry, none of the victims was standing erect when he was killed."

I dipped into re-call. Wisniewski had apparently been sitting in a doorway when killed and it appeared that Van Leuggen had been at his desk.

"Ralph," I said, "Upon further thought, I realize that it is just possible that I may have been wrong in my speculations about Leonardi. There are just too many unacceptable coincidences. Leonardi *just happened* to feel a sneeze coming on as he *just*

happened to be opposite the alley entrance. He *just happened* to pull out that quarter with his handkerchief, and he *just happened* to be in the process of picking it up when he was struck."

"All right, Henry, then let's kick out the just happens. But Leonardi's been drinking in Casey's Tavern, where it's cozy and warm. And he's been drinking beer, which makes a lot of people sweat. So when he leaves, he's still got some of this sweat on his forehead. In the cool air outside, he feels it and he doesn't want to get pneumonia of the forehead, so he pulls out his bandana."

"Ha," I said skeptically, "And the quarter *just happens* to be pulled out of his pocket too?"

"It could have happened that way, Henry. But let's just say that somewhere in that dark alley, our small murder person is lurking. And this murder person *tosses* a quarter out of the darkness onto the sidewalk to get Leonardi to bend down."

I laughed lightly. "Ralph, if you are walking on the sidewalk and suddenly a quarter flips out of the near-darkness and lands at your feet, surely a normal ocular reflex would catch the arc of that toss? Surely one's attention would be directed to the source of that arc. And surely one would be on one's alert — possibly even assuming a defensive stance — rather than mindlessly diving for the quarter."

"Henry, suppose this murder person threw the quarter *behind* Leonardi? Where he wouldn't see that arc of yours? But Leonardi would *hear* the tinkle and he would turn, and he would see the quarter and he would think that he had just pulled it out of his pocket with the bandana, *or* that he had a hole in his pocket and the quarter had just dropped out. And so he would bend down to pick it up."

"Ralph, you have the wildest imagination."

Ralph beamed "Praise from the master."

He delayed our departure from headquarters by going to Captain Parkington and quite unnecessarily requesting that another car be dispatched immediately to the stakeout at the Van Leuggen home.

When we got to my apartment, I turned on the TV set to the educational channel just in time to catch a study on longevity in the Caucasus. An eagerly smiling native assured us that he was indeed 158 years old and that this was undoubtedly due to yogurt, heredity, a bland life, and, one suspected, foggy, foggy record keeping.

"All right," Ralph said, "So you think that one of the twins did it? But which one?"

I smiled. "Why, which one would you pick, Ralph?"

"It would have to be Roscoe."

"Why?"

"Sigmund doesn't have a motive. He's been disinherited."

"Ralph, Ralph," I chided.

"There are other motives besides money. However, even assuming money, Sigmund only *appears* to be without a motive. Surely he will *contest* the will? And surely the fact that Uncle Cornelius made a hobby out of disinheriting his heirs-apparent would indicate to a sympathetic court that Sigmund just had the misfortune to be caught on a down-swing and that his uncle had never really intended the disinheritance to stick. I rather suspect that Sigmund will be granted his one-third share of the estate, especially since I doubt that his siblings would even think of seriously disputing his claim."

Ralph wondered for a moment. "Maybe all *three* of them are in on the killing?"

"No, Ralph. If that were true, surely they would have arranged to support each other with mutually interlocking alibis instead of having to resort to this serious business."

Ralph shrugged. "Well, how are you going to tell which twin is which, Henry? Especially if they're wearing different jackets tonight. Suppose they get cute and vague and decide to cover up for each other and not remember who is who? You could get your whole case thrown out of court."

I chuckled. "Ralph, I am

thoroughly prepared. It is a commonly known fact to a select few of us, that people always fold their arms across their chests the same way, i.e. right arm over the left, or left arm over the right. And I observed that Roscoe folds his right arm over his left, and Sigmund, just the opposite."

It was eight-thirty that evening before the buzzer to my apartment sounded.

I opened the door.

Ariadne Van Leuggen.

"Ah, ha!" she said, "Just as I suspected. It's a trap!"

Nevertheless she stepped into the room and closed the door behind her. "Am I too soon, or too late?"

"I'd guess just about in time," Ralph said.

"Miss Van Leuggen," I said sincerely, "Undoubtedly you have an honest and reasonable explanation for your presence here at this particular point in time?"

Of course she had. "Well, after you left, I just happened to look up your address in the phone book. Did you know that you are the only Turnbuckle in the entire metropolitan area?"

Ralph came to my defense. "But just mention his name in Sheboygan."

She continued. "And you, Henry S. Turnbuckle, live here at 777 Cranberry Blossom Lane. Well, anyway, this evening I picked up the newspaper and there in three long-winded para-

graphs I read about a purse snatcher who's out on bail and his address just happens to be 777 Cranberry Blossom Lane. And somehow that got me to thinking. After all, how often in one day, do you run across people who live at 777 Cranberry Blossom Lane? So I just had to come over here and find out what was cooking. One of the mail slots in the foyer has the name Kenelm Digby in suspiciously new lettering, but there is no Henry S. Turnbuckle. So I absolutely had to check it out."

She glanced about my living-room. "Are all those books yours?"

Ralph nodded for me. "He also goes to the public library and withdraws like crazy. Henry is the only detective ever to rush back into a burning building to rescue his library card."

That was years ago, but I still blush at the incident. If I'd known then how simple it was to obtain a duplicate, I could have saved my eyebrows.

The door buzzer sounded again.

I smiled triumphantly. "As soon as I ask our newest visitor to fold his arms, we will know who our murderer is."

I opened the door.

It was Winterset. The butler.

Damn.

As long as he was there, and had no satisfactory explanation for his presence, Ralph and I searched him. We found the fireplace poker up his right sleeve and a tube of

lipstick in his left-hand pocket. Under the circumstance, and possibly my uncompromising glare, the culprit decided to confess.

He had been bilking the Van Leuggen household accounts for some fifteen years and had finally been found out. That even Van Leuggen had not only fired Winterset, but had decided to call the police.

At which point, Winterset had panicked, seized the poker, and killed his employer.

Winterset's first instinct had been to flee. However he was stayed by a loathing to depart penniless. After all, he had invested his ill-gotten gains in burgeoning real estate, and it would take a bit of time to convert those holdings into portable cash.

He knew that Cornelius Van Leuggen's heirs would, of course, be prime suspects. However would the police investigation center only them? Very likely not. After all, as many wealthy men seem to be killed by their servants, as by their heirs.

Therefore the murder would have to be made to appear as though it had been committed by an intruder. A total stranger. But again, that was rather weak unless ...

Why not make this murder simply one of a series? And why not bury Van Leuggen's murder in the *middle* of that series, where it would receive the least con-

centrated attention?

So he had pocketed a tube of lipstick which Ariadne had forgotten on her uncle's desk, turned out the lights of the study to forestall an untimely discovery of the body, and then gone out looking for victims *A* and *B*. After all, one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb.

As I had so clearly deduced, victim *B*, Leonardi, had come out of the tavern, felt a sneeze coming on, and in the quick-draw for his handkerchief, had also pulled a quarter from his pocket. He had been in the process of retrieving the coin when Winterset struck.

Murders *A* and *B* accomplished, Winterset had returned to the Van Leuggen study, verified that the body had still not been discovered, and then scrawled the letter *C* on the victim's forehead.

When Winterset left the room again, he automatically turned out the lights. When Ralph brought up the point, Winterset had realized that his fingerprints were certainly on the light switches, and he quickly came up with a suitable explanation for their presence.

Winterset had intended to kill at least three times more, so that the death of Van Leuggen would be neatly book-ended between the others.

When Ralph tendered his rich man, poor man, nursery rhyme theory and his speculation that the murderer's next victim would be a thief, Winterset had filed that

possibility in the back of his mind. And while reading of the murders in the evening newspaper, he had, of course, noted my item concerning Kenelm Digby, and had thought, *Well, why not?*

We took Winterset to headquarters for booking and when the paperwork was done, Ariadne was still with us, lost in admiration at my efficiency.

I took her and Ralph to a new bar in the neighborhood and, for my part, I ordered a glass of sherry.

The bartender scratched his head, searched the back bar and then opened a trap door in the floor and descended into what I supposed was a cellar storage area.

"Ariadne," I said, "Twins and a butler in the same case are a little too much."

The bartender wiped up some damp spots on the bar in front of me.

I stared at him. "Didn't you just go down into the cellar?" I looked at the still open trap door. "I mean, aren't you down there right now?"

He smiled. "That's my brother, Albert. I'm Bernie."

I braced myself. "Twins?"

"Triplets. That's our brother Chester at the sink washing glasses."

When Albert ascended from the depths with the screw-cap bottle, I had him fill my glass all the way to the top.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE SUBSCRIBERS

In September 1979 a severe fire at the plant which prints MSMM destroyed subscriber mailing labels and a large quantity of the October 1979 issue. This is why your subscriber's copy was late in getting to you. Unfortunately, because of this setback, the November issue, normally sent out early in October, was also late in many instances. We'd like to thank you for bearing with us during that hectic period and hope that you'll accept our sincere apologies for the delay.

The Million Dollar Brain And The Strange Case Of Louie The Hippo

by HAROLD STRAUBING

Who needs Philo Vance when we have Reginald Van Throckmortan III? Certainly not Louie the Hippo, although the voluptuous and willing Candy Stik is another matter!

"I'm for turning in Johnny the Hippo."
Scarlotti for the murder of Louie I tell this to Reginald Van

111

Throckmorton III as we stand by the body of Louie the Hippo. Throckmorton smiles, and when he smiles only one part of his mouth curls up, near the end, and he reaches for one of his imported cigarettes from a solid gold cigarette case initialled with large sapphires.

"This may have more to it than meets the eye, old Chap. After all, what do we know about the psychological aspects of this case?"

"Look," I say, "I been on the force a long time, I know a murder when I see one, and this time I know who dunnit!"

Throckmorton lights his cigarette slowly from a solid gold lighter that carries his initials in — diamonds, and says to me in between delicate puffs, "Let's not be too hasty, Brophy. Let's review the case carefully. There is no telling what may turn up, don't ye know?"

"I'm innercent," Scarlotti shrieks. So help me, may lightning strike me where I stand if I done it!"

"There," says Throckmorton, flipping the ash of his imported cigarette which I hear costs more a carton than I make a week, "you've heard the man swear that he is innocent. What more can you ask, old Bean? If you have not faith in human nature, then after all, what is there left?"

I look at Throckmorton and I

think maybe you gotta be a chump to have dough. Throckmorton has inherited so many millions that he has had no time to count how many, and rumor has it, he can not count that high. He is a millionaire sportsman, and what he calls an amateur detective, which makes as much sense to me as an amateur fish peddler, or an amateur grocer, but he is a friend of the Commissioner, and if the Commissioner passes the word around that he goes out on any homicide case, who am I to argue? Murder is my bread and butter, not a hobby. But this crack about human nature gets me. I am about to crack back when the million dollar brain goes to work.

"Have you some sort of alibi, old Bean?" he asks Scarlotti.

"Sure, sure," slobbers Scarlotti, "I been at the Casa Havana. I'm as innercent as a new born babe, I tell ye. I ate supper with Candy Stik. Just ast her, that's all, just ast her."

Throckmorton whistles. He is impressed. I am not impressed at all. I smell something phony. Candy Stik is a high class dame who warbles at the Casa Havana. Nobody goes to hear her, just to look at her. This costs them twenty-five bucks which is laughingly called a cover charge. Candy does not have that much covering.

"That's a lie!" I snap at Scarlotti. He looks scared. As if he thinks I know something. I have hit a bulls-eye when Reginald

interrupts with, "There is only one thing to do, old Chap, and that is to run over to the Casa Havana and check his alibi."

"Yeah! Yeah!" screeches Scarlotti, "check me alibi. Yez'll loin I'm the wrong guy. I'm innercent, I tell ye, innercent as a choir boy!"

"Well go in my car," announces Reginald Van Throckmortan III, moving his expensive shoes toward the door. The are still wrapped in the original cellophane they are bought in, as the soft gold they are made of rubs off.

This is okay by me, as his car is much bigger than my prow job, and he has all the conveniences. A police radio, a siren, and a small wash stand near the rear door.

"You don't mind, I hope, if I put the cuffs on Scarlotti while we take this pleasure jaunt ... just in case," I add, "he happens to be the murderer."

"Anything you wish, old Chap," he flips at me. "Only be sure you don't let yourself in for a false arrest charge, old Bean."

"I'll take that chance," I tell him as I snap the cuffs on Scarlotti.

This speech gives Scarlotti a lot of courage and he shoots off his mouth about how his mouthpiece will see to it that I pound a beat in Corona until the next World's Fair. I am willing to take the chance, so I snap the cuffs in place and push Scarlotti down the steps to the car. We settle back on the large settee that Throckmortan

has built in the back of his car, and then Reginald picks up a telephone that hangs on the wall and dials a number so he can talk to his chauffeur.

"Home, please," he says absent mindedly.

"Home!" I yell at him. "I thought we was going to the Casa Havana! I thought you was interested in this case!"

"I am, old Chap," he tells me as he lights up another cigarette. He now carries two cigarettes in his mouth, and the car is beginning to fill up with smoke, "but after all, one must dress!"

"Dress, my eye!" I tells him. "This is an investigation, not a party."

I am about to follow up with some cutting remark when I see that Reginald is reaching for another cigarette. He has his eyes half closed. This is always a sign that he is thinking. The air conditioning can hardly handle the load of the other two cigarettes he has burning. Scarlotti is rolling on the floor choking from the smoke, so I decided to keep quiet. I lay down quietly on the thick Persian rug, hoping to breathe some carbon monoxide which might cut down on my intake of the cigarette smoke.

We arrive at his mansion. While two men rush up to roll out a carpet for Throckmortan so's he can walk into the house, I get up and nudge Scarlotti to do likewise. He is out cold.

"What is it, old Bean," asks Reginald, putting out a half dozen cigarettes. "Did he fall asleep?"

"Give him some air," I growls at Mr. Rich, "or my only suspect in this case will cheat the chair."

"Of course," he says, signalling to six men who quickly roll down the windows and open the velvet drapes.

"Also, hurry up," I tells him, "this case ain't going to wait until you get dressed."

"I won't be a minute, old Chap," he tells me. "I'm just going to change my cigarette case. It's so informal, it embarrasses me to carry it, really."

By the time he returns, I have already got Scarlotti to a sitting position. He is still groggy and keeps mumbling, "Where am I? I'm innercent! Where am I? I didn't do it!"

Throckmortan is dialing the car phone while his stooges roll up the carpet. He gets a wrong number. The footman. He mumbles something about forgetting it was long distance. He dials again, and finally gets the chauffeur. He tells him to head for the Casa Havana.

We are on our way.

"It is very strange," he half says to himself, as he reaches for a cigarette. He takes out a large diamond, which has his initials in gold on it, and opens it up. It is his evening cigarette case.

"What is so strange?" I ask him, taking the offered cigarette.

I see Scarlotti has the same idea

I have, and takes one, too. If we can burn up the cigarettes we won't have to put up with them all night.

"That smoking gun you found at the scene of the crime, old Boy; it had two bullets missing."

He takes out a cigarette lighter which I notice is not the same that he has had before. It is one large diamond with his initials set in with matched pearls.

"So what?" I asks, taking the light.

"So this, old Bean. There were exactly *two bullet holes in Louie the Hippo!*"

"What does it prove?" I ask, coughing a lung out as some of the smoke from the cigarette goes to work.

"It proves," says he, as he lights another cigarette, "*that that gun was the murder weapon!*"

"Check!" I say, looking around for a place to douse the cigarette. I see Scarlotti is turning grey, but you got to hand it to him, he keeps on smoking.

Reginald motions to the Persian rug. "You can put it out on the floor. I have the carpeting changed twice daily. Now," he continues, "if we can prove that the owner of the weapon was there at the scene of the crime, and used *that* weapon, we will have our killer!"

"Excellent deduction!" I say warmly, as I take the cigarette from the limp hand of Scarlotti.

The million dollar brain relaxes

on the cushions and the smoke from four cigarettes, hanging loosely from his lips, drifts slowly up toward the muralled ceiling of the car, and I see that he is in deep thought.

The rest of the trip is uneventful until we arrive at the Casa Havana. There is a small argument with the doorman of the club. Seems he will not wash his hands before turning the solid gold knob on the car. An ex-lightweight champ in the employ of Reginald cinches the argument, and they wash the hands of the unconscious doorman. In no time at all we are in the Casa Havana.

A fat old man is pinching the cheek of a smiling hat check girl as we walk in, and Reginald deposits his hat. In exchange for the hat check, Reginald writes out a check, the last in the book, throwing the stubs away. I can not see the full amount, but I notice the zeros run down the edge of the paper. The hat check girl takes one look at the amount, and for a moment she thinks it is a gag. But another look at the signature, the crude "X" which runs down under the line convinces her it is real. As we walk in to be greeted by the head waiter I notice that she slams her fat friend so hard that she not only dislocates his toupee, but knocks out his false teeth, and steps on him on her way out.

"A table for four," Reginald tells the head waiter, and as we are marched down the aisle of the

nite club, "and please tell Miss Candy Stik we wish to see her," he adds.

When we get to the table I can see that Reginald is embarrassed as he feels his pockets.

He looks at the waiter's outstretched hand and stammers, "I'm sorry, I don't seem to have any more checks with me. Would you," he hesitates, "accept cash?"

The waiter doesn't so much as shake his head. There is a small flutter of his eyelid, and I can see Reginald is relieved. He dips into a pocket and lifts out a small sack of gold coins, which he deposits in the waiter's hand.

It seems to agree with the waiter, for as we are seated, I notice the waiter walking out, upsetting a lit crepe suzette on the head of one of the steady customers of the club.

It is not long before Candy Stik herself slinks up to the table. Candy Stik is wearing a heavy perfume — and that's about all. The evening gown she is wearing is a little smaller than a bathing suit, but the customers do not seem to mind this.

"What's on your mind?" she says as she slides up to our table. "Willie, the Nose, says you wants to see me."

I flash my badge and say, "Police business!" Scarlotti is still a little grey, and he nods a hello.

"We're checking Scarlotti's alibi," I tell her. "He says he ate

with you here. Is that so?"

"Yeah," she says, "we had lunch, and then he went over to Louie the Hippo. He said something about killing him, but," she says, getting up to leave, "I don't know why I'm telling you all this."

"Just a moment, Miss Stik," calls out Reginald. He smiles, showing a diamond-filled tooth. The smile does not fool me for a minute. I can see he is thinking as he looks at her well-built body, but I can not tell what his thoughts are. His face is a mask.

"My curious friend is on the police force, and so has no manners," he explains. "I think," he adds, "we speak the same language!"

"What's the language?" she asks suspiciously, as she begins to slide toward Reginald. Every one of her charms looks right at him. He looks right back. His face still a mask.

"I'm sorry I haven't my check book with me," he says, "but I'm sure you are not above accepting a small gift in exchange for some information."

"How small?" she asks.

"A boat?"

"How small?"

"A sixty-foot yacht?"

She nods. "That's my language all right!"

She starts to slide forward, and nods to a band leader. A blue spotlight covers her as she slinks toward Reginald.

Throckmorton, with two cigaret-

tes hanging loosely from his lips, takes out his fountain pen. It is made of platinum, with a piece of pure radium as the ball in the tip. He sniffs at the napkin he holds. "Hmimm, cotton! I wonder," he murmurs, "if it will write on a cotton napkin. I usually write only on pure Irish linen."

He starts to write, *I HEREBY TRANSFER AND ASSIGN ALL RIGHTS TO THE YACHT KNOWN AS MELINDA II TO CANDY STIK...*

Candy Stik looks on and purrs. I am getting impatient. Reginald senses my itch, and with a flourish puts down his famous "X" and says, "There, the yacht is yours!"

Candy Stik is sitting on his lap stroking his hair. She purrs.

"Now," says Reginald looking at her with his eyes nothing but narrow slits, "what do you know about Louie the Hippo?"

"Purrr."

"What do you know about Scarlotti?"

"Purrr."

"You see, old Chap," says Reginald turning to me, "there's nothing to loosening the tongue if you know how!"

I nod my head. I do not see where this investigation is going. I wait. Reginald lights another cigarette. The smoke is beginning to reach Scarlotti. He is beginning to turn that familiar gray.

I see Benny the Rod, walking by. I signal him. Benny begins to cry.

"I didn't do it, Brophy. Those bums in Chicago are crazy tryin' to pin that rap on me. I was never there. I just flew in from 'Frisco. And I can prove it."

I tell him all I want is some information. I straighten Scarlotti in his chair. He now begins to turn green. I tell Benny to sing, and sing fast.

"What do you know about Louie the Hippo?" I ask.

"Stop twisting my arm," he screams. I see he is the same old Benny. He still can't take it. "I'll sing, I'll sing!"

By this time the waiter brings over his drink, his doll, and a couple of chairs. Benny dries his eyes, and fixes up a sling from a table cloth, and says, "I ain't afraid to spill it to you, Brophy, because you're a right guy."

He slips two straws into a Jim Beam bottle, and he and his doll start to sip while he talks. I notice that Reginald still has Candy Stik on his lap and outside of getting his hair mussed up, he ain't got a yacht's worth of information yet.

"As you know I used to be a partner of Louie the Hippo, and I had a piece of this club. When Scarlotti discovers Candy Stik warbling in a dive out of town, he brings her here, and Louie, as part of the deal has to squeeze me out.

"Naturally I am perturbed to no end when I hear of this. But nice guy that I am, I am willing to let go of my half for one hundred grand plus a little extra to pay for the

buying and handling of a rod which is necessary to persuade my ex-partner that it is to his advantage to dissolve our partnership.

"When Scarlotti brings her into the club, Louie the Hippo, starts to shower Candy with gifts. Small things, y'know. Like an automobile, or a ten room house. Candy doesn't exactly hate the idea, especially since Scarlotti tries to keep up with Louie, and sends her little trinkets like mink coats, and gold watches. But last night Louie sends over a diamond ring. When Scarlotti finds out, he runs over to see Candy. They have lunch, and Scarlotti learns the bad news is true. He rushes out promising to kill Louie the Hippo. He says he will make her a widow before she is a bride. That's all I know."

His doll kneels over, the straw still in her mouth as she falls.

"If the boys at headquarters ast you if you seen me," continues Benny, "tell 'em you ain't. I just got in last night from Houston, and I don't know nothin' about the murder of Joe the Stoolie in Chicago."

"Okay," I says, "okay, I'll forget I seen you for about twenty minutes, so if you got some place to go, beat it!"

Benny picks up his bottle and kicks the doll off his shoes which he has slipped off while he is reciting, and runs.

I turn to Reginald who as far as I

can see ain't getting nowhere with the investigation. He is smoking four cigarettes, and a number of people who have seats near him are leaving. Those who ain't fast enough have dropped in their tracks. I see Candy Stik catches on fast. She is smoking two cigarettes and is purring. Reginald ain't saying nothing. He just looks at Candy, and I can see he is thinking. His face is still a mask.

"Okay," I tells Reginald, "the case is closed. *I know who killed Louie the Hippo!*"

"What!" I can clearly see that Reginald is shocked. As far as he is concerned the investigation is just beginning.

"You heard Benny the Rod's song," I tell him.

Throckmorton's eyes narrow to slits. He nods. He takes out another cigarette. I see he is in deep thought.

Scarlotti is my guess," I tell him. "The motive is jealousy, plus this dump which he will own when Louie bows out. The smoking gun we find at the scene of the crime belongs to Scarlotti. It all checks! I say it's Scarlotti. What about it, Johnny?"

I ask this question as I bend over him. He is turning blue. He opens an eye, and gasps, "All right, I done it. I killed him! Now, (cough) get me outa here. (Cough) Get me to a nice clean smelling jail. (Cough) Only hurry ... I'm going fast."

"Remarkable," gasps Regi-

nald. "What gave you your lead, old Bean?"

"That's where a regular cop has it all over you amateurs," I tell Reginald. "We learn how to piece information together."

"Really, old Chappie," says Reginald, slightly annoyed as he slips off a small diamond mountain from his finger which I notice is incidentally attached to a ring. Candy Stik tries it on for size.

"My first clue to the murderer of Louie the Hippo is the smoking gun," I tell him.

"Of course, of course," the million dollar genius says, "that's what I thought."

I notice that Candy has removed the cellophane covering of one of Reginald's shoes, and is trying the gold on for size.

"But what made you *sure*, old Chap, what made you so *positive*?"

"Well, I explain, "I was passing by, right outside the office, when I heard the shots. I ran into the office and there I saw," I tell Reginald as Candy mistakes his wallet for a glove, and is trying it on for size, "Scarlotti standing over Louie the Hippo with the smoking gun still in his hand. That's where I got the murder weapon, and that is where you came in."

"Amazing," breathes Reginald as Candy fingers his diamond cigarette case, "amazing!"

"Purr," murmurs Candy, "Purrrr ..."

Fair's Fair

by JACK PETREE

We were best friends and bitter enemies. He had to die, there was no question about that. Everybody agreed this was so, because there was no way they could think otherwise!

"I DON'T BELIEVE IT," he said as the shortest of the three boys pulled the gun and pointed it at him.

"You'd better believe it," the boy said. "Gimme the wallet and you won't get hurt. Hurry!"

To Jim Anderson the robbery seemed the perfect end to the day. Not perfect in the sense of good, but perfect in the sense of appropriate.

The day had begun for Jim with his wife picking a fight for no good reason and wishing him dead as he stamped out of the house. His nine o'clock meeting with the agency art director ended in a heated argument with the art director finally shouting "drop dead" at him and storming out. After the meeting he'd done some work at his desk, then started for lunch. A bad move. As he passed the stair-

well someone in the crowd bumped him. He fell down a whole flight of stairs. Luckily he wasn't hurt, but the day was ruined so he decided to walk downtown. Now, a robbery. A real capper to a rotten day. Jim handed over the wallet. The boy riffled through it, then stopped, a strange look on his face. He pulled the trigger of the gun. Jim Anderson died almost instantly.

"Hey man! What the hell did you do that for? We was going to rob the dude, not waste him. What's the matter with you, man?" The boy with the gun held up the credit card he'd taken from the dead man's wallet. The others read the name on it. "You mean that's Jim Anderson?" The boy with the gun nodded yes. "Hey man, that's different. Jim Anderson deserved to die."

Jim and I were in competition with each other from the start. I'm sure that our parents discussed relative merits as we lay side by side in the hospital nursery. In school, Jim took all of the scholastic honors. I was always a close second. In high school I was the all-state quarterback. Jim caught most of my passes. I was the center and leading scorer on our school's state championship basketball team. Jim was the playmaker guard. Each of us got offers to play professional baseball. We went to college instead, roomed together and in a double ceremony after graduation, we each married one of a set of twins. If Jim hadn't tried what he did, we'd probably wound up running against each other for president.

After college we went to work for the advertising firm of Doyle, Thompson, Jensen and Savitch. It was the top agency in the region, and we were lucky to work there but it put us in the position, once again, of competing. This time our livelihoods were on the line. Still, we'd had a lifetime of practice and we managed to keep the competition friendly. At least I kept it friendly. Jim didn't. That's why he's dead now.

Both Jim and I excelled at our jobs and it wasn't long before the agency considered us indispensable. *Advertising Age* did a feature on us calling us the stars of the future. Everything would

have been great except for one thing. We were both good and that limited our progress up the corporate ladder. Each of us was qualified for, and deserved, each promotion that came along. Finally, the agency, in an attempt to keep both of us happy, created the position of co-agency manager. It was a stroke of genius. For the first time in our lives, Jim and I didn't have to compete with each other. We were a team, blending our talents to improve the agency and attract new business. Everything was perfect. Then Mr. Doyle ran his car into a tree. He died and a partnership opened at Doyle, Thompson, Jensen and Savitch.

It was the chance of a lifetime. At our age, a full partnership in a major advertising agency was something only to be dreamed about, and now, suddenly, one of us was to have the great prize. The question was: which of us? A co-managership is one thing and a partnership is something else. The partners were not about to split the pie any further than they had to. One of us would be a partner and the other would be unemployed.

Both Jim and I deserved the chance, and the partners knew it. They met every day during the next two weeks but couldn't decide which of us to award the partnership to. Finally Mr. Jensen devised a solution to the problem. A contest would be held. The winner would be the new partner.

It was a great idea and if Jim had followed the rules he'd still be alive. He didn't. He isn't. Fair's fair.

The contest rules were laid out for us at a lunch meeting. A town had been selected by the partners. It had been selected at random from a list of towns in the United States of about 125,000 population. We weren't given the name of the town but we did get the fact sheets that contained all of the necessary data to mount an ad campaign in the town. Each of us was given \$10,000 to spend on a campaign.

The object of the campaign was to make people like us.

At the end of a three month period a survey would be taken in the town. One question would be asked. The question was: "Who do you like best? Jim Anderson or Jack Smith?" A control survey was taken before the contest to make sure that neither of us had an advantage simply because people liked one name better than another. It was a fair test of ability. If only Jim hadn't cheated.

\$10,000 might seem like a lot of money, but when it comes to mounting a three month ad campaign in a town of 125,000 it's a pittance. It would be tough to develop a good campaign, but that was the point of the contest. I was sure I would win.

The next few days were really tough as I worked to plan the campaign that would determine

my future and kept up on my regular work on top of that. While I slaved, Jim acted like Aesop's grasshopper. As far as I could see he did no extra work at all. Finally I choked back my pride and asked him about it. His answer stunned me.

"I've had my campaign planned since we walked out of the restaurant."

I couldn't believe it. I went back to my desk and worked through the night. What could Jim know that I didn't know? He had somehow found out the name of the town? Pushed by fear I worked until dawn. Our campaigns were due for presentation to the partners and I wanted everything to be perfect. I showed up at the conference room with red eyes and a yawn. Jim swept into the room looking confident, and ready to beat the world. I was ready to beat him.

For a variety of reasons the partners had stipulated that Jim and I plan our campaigns, present them and then allow the partners to place the advertising in advance of the actual start of the contest. After the presentation was made, nothing could be changed. We each had to go with what we had developed at that point. Our only responsibility after the presentation would be to oversee the actual production of campaign materials.

I was first up. I placed orders for a program of spot radio and a small amount of television. For the

last month of the campaign I added some newspaper and a few billboards. I wasn't completely happy, but the \$10,000 was shot. I'd done all that I could and was confident that Jim could do no better. Especially with only fifteen minutes planning.

Jim made us all sit up and take notice. He'd thrown all of his eggs into one basket. He ordered a saturation showing of Outdoor — that's a fancy name for billboards — for each of the three months. That was enough to wipe out his whole budget.

Nothing but billboards? Everyone was amazed. I admired Jim's courage but questioned his reasoning. I could feel the pen that I would use to sign the partnership papers in my hand. I knew I would win. I would have too, if Jim hadn't cheated.

I didn't see much of Jim for the next few days. Now, it seemed, it was my turn to relax and Jim's to work. He did a complete turn around. Now he worked late into the night. It seemed that he'd decided to take a personal hand in the production of the posters for his billboards. I managed a peek at his design — just to make sure that nothing untoward was happening — and saw nothing to justify the fuss. All the poster said was, "Jim Anderson is a nice guy." Dark blue lettering, rather small, and a light green background. Nothing creative as far as I could see. Unfortunately I

couldn't see what went on at night. If only I had, Jim might be alive now. Too bad.

The three months seemed like a year, but finally the day came when the partners called Jim and me into the conference room to give us the results. Jim was greeted with warm smiles and handshakes. I wasn't.

Mr. Thompson opened the meeting. "Jim, I'd have sworn that no more than a percentage point or two would have separated the two of you in the survey, but when you ordered all those billboards and nothing else I give you up for dead." Mr. Thompson turned to me then. "Jack, what can I say? Over 90% of the people in the town liked Jim better. He wins the partnership."

Everything went blank for a minute. I couldn't believe it. Something was dreadfully wrong. I demanded the right to examine the results of the survey. Abe Lincoln couldn't get 90% on a survey, much less Jim. Somehow he'd tampered with the results. My only chance was to prove it. The partners gladly gave me the survey. They said they'd had the same suspicion, so one of the partners had gone to the town and checked. According to him, the survey was accurate. I still had to try. I could find nothing.

As the contest was over, the partners told me which town had been used. I caught the next flight to the town, checked into a motel

and began to check the survey results myself. As soon as I would introduce myself people would begin to slide away. No one wanted to associate with me. Those that did answer my questions said that they had no real reason to distrust me but they did. That's why they'd said that they liked Jim better than me. I left town the day after the police searched my room.

"IF YOU NEED IT, I'll give you the best letter of recommendation you've ever seen." Jim was shaking my hand. I had resigned.

"Stuff your recommendation. Tell me how you did it," I said.

"Did what?" Jim replied. How I longed to wipe that smirk off his face! "I know that you think I cheated somehow, but unless you can prove it, you should keep your mouth shut if you want to stay in this business. Agency people don't much like whiners. Personally I never thought that you would be one. You're good. You won't have any trouble getting another job. In fact, you know that you can stay here if you want to."

Jim knew that I could no more stay on with him owning a part of the business than he could have if I'd won the contest.

"I'll have my things out of the office tonight," I said as I walked away.

After I boxed my belongings in the office, I decided to go to the art department and pick up some

samples of designs that I'd had a hand in developing. As I was leaving, one of the clean-up boys walked by with an armload of old artwork. Something caught my eye and I stopped him.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Just some old junk I'm throwing away," he answered.

"Let me see that." He held out the stack of cardboard. I picked up the top piece. It was a stencil with my name on it. "Here, let me throw this out for you. I'm going that way."

I took the bundle from him. He thanked me and went on his way.

As soon as the boy was out of sight, I grabbed the stencil, pieced it together and read: "Jace Smith cannot be trusted." The letters cut from the cardboard were sixteen inches high and stretched into a fifteen foot sentence. Some kind of light green paint was dried onto the cardboard. I examined the stencil, puzzled. Then I figured the whole thing out.

I knew now what Jim had done to make me lose the contest.

A few years ago an experiment was conducted to test the effectiveness of subliminal messages on the unsuspecting mind. Patrons in a theatre were subjected to a series of messages flashed on the screen during a movie. The message was projected for only an instant and was repeated several times per minute. The patrons were never aware that they'd been

subjected to an advertising message, but nearly all acted on it. The message had instructed them to buy popcorn. The theatre sold out its supply during the first half of the movie. Jim had applied the same principle to billboards. The green on the stencil matched almost exactly, but not quite, the green background on the billboard designed by Jim for the contest. He'd put a fifteen foot message on each poster. The eye didn't see it, but the brain did. No wonder the people didn't like me. Jim had told them not to. Now I knew what had been done to me. The next question was: what could I do about it?

I forced myself to think through my anger. I couldn't go to the partners. They'd either think that I was lying or that Jim had been especially clever. I decided to find Jim. When I found him, I had to force myself to keep from killing him on the spot. Somehow I managed to stay calm. "Jim," I said. "I know I said I'd leave tonight but I've thought it over and if you don't mind I'd like to do you a favor to show there's no hard feelings."

Jim was suspicious. "What kind of favor?"

"I've been working hard on the Rico Rico Run account and I think I've just about landed them. Why don't you let me finish the job before I go? It'll be a way to pay the firm back for all they've done for me."

Jim still didn't trust me. "How do you mean that?"

I mustered up all of my abilities. "Oh, come on Jim. I didn't mean it like that. You won, and there's nothing I can do about that. Besides, you said yourself that I'd have no trouble getting another job. I just want to do what's right by the firm before I leave. I give you my word that I won't do anything to mess up the account."

I'm a good salesman. Jim fell for the line all the way.

"OK," he said. "I was a little worried about someone new taking the account over, and you did develop it, so I suppose that it's your right to finish it up."

My right indeed. All Jim was thinking about was dollar bills, but I had what I wanted so I thanked him and went to work.

The next weeks were busy ones, but I enjoyed them as I'd never enjoyed anything before. Finally I had the Rico Rico campaign prepared. It was heavy on billboards. I went in to see Jim

"Rico Rico is ready to go." I told him. "The billboards go up tomorrow, so I guess I'm ready to leave now."

I could see that Jim didn't suspect a thing. He saw me to the door, thanked me for the work and handed me an envelope with a nice bonus in it. I put the envelope in my briefcase, right alongside the stencil that I had made. Mine said, "Jim Anderson deserves to die."

Fair's fair. ●

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Stiff Competition



by JOHN BALL

Steve Shagan, the author of *Save the Tiger*, has come up with a very timely book built around the present oil crisis and enormous price increases. *The Formula* deals with a secret method of making synthetic oil from renewable resources presumably developed by the Nazis during World War II. There is a lot of action as Los Angeles police detective Barney Caine starts on the trail of a local murder and ends up spending most of his time in Berlin, the favorite background for plot and counterplot. Mr. Shagan

writes very well and he keeps things moving. Apart from the use of some stock characters, a rewarding book and a probable movie. (Morrow, \$10.95)

☆☆☆

A very good "thriller," as the British call it, is John Redgate's *The Last Decathlon* which is built around the Moscow Olympic Games in 1980. An American star athlete favored to win the decathlon disappears just before the games begin to pursue a grim business of his own. He takes on an almost impossible task, the

127

nature of which is well concealed until the end. Good background and atmosphere make this book a winner, and excellent plot will keep your attention all the way. (Delacorte, \$8.95)

☆☆☆

L.P. Davies, who in the past has come up with some of the trickiest plots in the literature, goes all the way into the occult in *The Land of Leys*. Laid in the "witchcraft ridden" section of England where mysterious, invisible paths converge, strange things happen until the gates of hell itself are opened. There is a Van Helsing too, which keeps things interesting. (Double-day Crime Club, \$7.95)

☆☆☆

Campbell Black was impressive in his *Asterisk Destiny*; now he is back with *Brainfire*, a long and sometimes agonizingly slow novel built around parapsychology. The Russians have uncovered an elderly Jewish lady whose only wish is to be allowed to go to Israel, where she believes her family to be. She is, however, a flaming ESP wonder and, quite naturally, they plan to use her for a major coup. Gradually the opposition wakes up, or at least one man does, and the battle is joined. The detail is so explicit the book goes on indefinitely, but there is a real surprise at the finish and a fairly clued one. (Morrow, \$10.95)

☆☆☆

There are strong overtones of

Omen in Barbara Roger's debut novel *The Doomsday Scroll*. This time the possible anti-Christ has surfaced as a boy in Israel who is kidnapped by fanatics. Mixed in is a CIA agent who has clearly lost his edge, and a possible formula for a new fuel that will rescue humanity from its dependence on oil—a popular theme at the moment. Miss Rogers has produced a good effort, but one based on ideas recently exploited somewhat more effectively elsewhere. (Dodd Mead, \$8.95)

☆☆☆

Lillian O'Donnell has a solid reputation as a crime writer and the creator of Detective Norah Mulcahane. Mici Anhalt, her alternate femtictive, makes a second appearance in *Falling Star*. She is involved with a once-glamorous actress, the daughter of a major, widely-celebrated actor, who has fallen to the point where she is living in a slum dwelling and planning a book that will expose some long-held theater secrets. When she is done in, Mici is called upon to investigate. The background is outstanding and the people in the book really live. (Putman, \$9.95)

☆☆☆

No month is complete without a good new police procedural; we have one in *Angle of Attack* by Rex Burns. The scene is Denver, and the man to watch is Homicide Detective. Gabriel Wager. The author knows his city and his cops,

which are essential elements in a book of this kind. There is crime, the mob, and a number of other elements that weave into a very compelling story. The least likely suspect device is very well used here. (Harper and Row, \$9.95)

☆☆☆

If you want to pick one book just to read, make it *Gold by Gemini* by Jonathan Gash. Lovejoy, the antique dealer who debuted in *The Judas Pair*, is back with all his expertise and sometimes dubious ethics. Antiques are not our thing, but Gash will hook you on them no matter who you are. Even if you resist the idea of antiques, he still manages to be fascinating. A winner from the word "antiques," which starts the book. Don't miss it. (Harper and Row, \$8.95)

☆☆☆

Israel pops up again in *Visa to Limbo* by William Haggard. This time Mr. Haggard is not up to his usual form and the story is a routine one. Col. Charles Russell, who is frequently engaging, does not appear, which will redeem the book for many readers. The attempted hijack of an Israeli airliner is very well done. (Walker, (8.95)

☆☆☆

As every Sherlockian knows, there has been a small flood recently of new stories from Dr. Watson, edited by various hands. Followers of the master sleuth of Baker Street will probably be definitely pleased by Frank

Thomas's *Sherlock Holmes and the Golden Bird*. It is faithful to the Canon and most entertaining as Holmes sets out to learn the secret of a gold bird that is at least distantly related to the Maltese Falcon. Dr. Watson remains in character and so does the formidable Mycroft Holmes whose activities are expanded upon here. (Pinnacle Books, \$2.25, paperback)

☆☆☆

Ellis Peters, the skilled British novelist, gave us a monumental book in *A Morbid Taste for Bones* a few months ago. Now she is back with *Rainbow's End*. This new work is rich with rural British atmosphere and is a steady performance by a fine pro. It is not in a class with her previous effort, but very few suspense tales are. If her new work suffers somewhat, it is by comparison with herself. (Morrow, \$8.95)

☆☆☆

Mark Walker makes his debut as a suspense writer with *Cassis: Resort to Vengeance*. Much of the story is laid on the French Riviera; its strongest point is its use of this rather common background. The theme of revenge is strong throughout the book as electronics expert Mate Robards, an expatriot American, runs into some tough-minded Corsicans who pursue him relentlessly. A good, engaging debut book which suggests that the author's next may be even better. (Walker, \$8.95) ●

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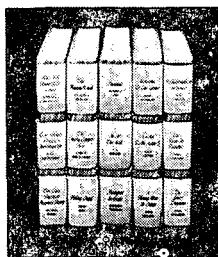
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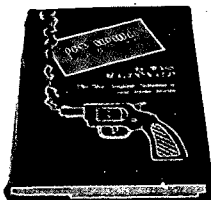
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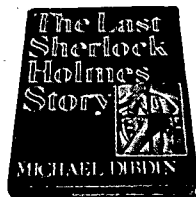
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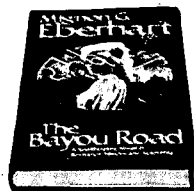
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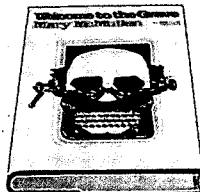
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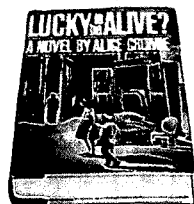
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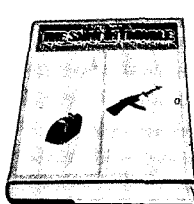
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